

Ash Wednesday 2026
Rev. Kimberly Glenn
February 18, 2026

In the name of the Holy Three In One, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Just this past Sunday, we stood on a mountaintop with Jesus, James, John and Peter. Together, and with the help of an icon that was printed on the bulletin, we saw the dazzling face of Christ. His face was shining like the sun. A voice from the cloud that descended over them declared, "This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him."

It was for the ones who witnessed and for us a breathtaking event. There was clarity after months of mystery and doubt. We saw and we knew Jesus was truly God's Son. And now the glow has turned to ash.

It's almost like a slap in the face. One moment we are in dazzling light and in this, the next moment, everything is gray. We mark this moment with the words: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." The rhythm of it reflects the rhythm of our lives, doesn't it? One moment we celebrate the utter beauty of creation and gift that life is and in the next we are saying, "What is all this chaos and nonsense? What has the world come to?" The rhythm reflects the rhythm of the Bible, the rhythm of the Gospel, the rhythm of life itself.

In scripture, we hear Jesus say: "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them." We live in a world where people want to be seen. On social media, we measure value in views and likes and clicks. There was a time when what we shared with others was more localized, our circles were more intimate. Now, our circles can be as wide as we want them to be. We publish photos of our accomplishments, not so much of our failures. And Jesus warns us: Be careful. Not because being proud of

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our accomplishments is wrong but because what we project is not the complete story. We can do the right things for the wrong reasons. Jesus does not condemn fasting, but when it is done in order to portray a piety that isn't truly present in us, the fasting can turn repentance into performance. "This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him."

Lent is not about impressing anyone with our six week sacrifice. It is not about impressing God or each other. Lent is about aligning spirits and our intentions more and more with Christ. Lent is about locating our treasure more and more in Him. Scripture tells us, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Ash Wednesday reminds us of the reality of our mortality. We store up treasures all the time: we build up our reputation, we put fences around our hearts and our homes for security, we acquire more and more material things for our comfort and, yes, to get admiration or even envy from others. The ashes we impose today gently whisper: psst...none of that lasts. As the Bible tells us, "Moth and rust consume." Time takes its toll. Bodies age. Photos fade. Prestige wanes.

That all of that is temporary is not meant to frighten us. It is meant to free us. If only we could see that we are the treasure, just ourselves, just the whole person that we are. We are loved. We are treasured. We are seen. Three times Jesus says: "Your Father who sees in secret." God sees as you pray the quiet prayer you pray when you can't sleep. God sees the small acts of kindness that no one thanks you for. God sees the struggles you never post about.

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The ashes on our foreheads are public and yet the transformation God desires from us happens on the inside, in our hearts, in our minds and in our souls. The ashes represent our desire to transform, to repent, to be better. The ashes proclaim aspiration, not accomplishment.

We choose to repent not because God is eager to punish us but because God is eager to restore us, to make us whole. We might choose to fast during Lent, not to prove our iron clad willpower but to remember what and who truly satisfies us. We give generously, not to impress others with our wealth and generosity but to loosen the grip that our wealth and possessions have on our hearts. We pray not because we are supposed to or to sound holier than thou to others but to be formed by the communion that prayer leads us to.

Remember that you are dust. And remember always that you are deeply seen and deeply loved. You are held always in God's heart. The One whose light no darkness can overcome shares your yoke and heals our hearts.

Today we bear the ashes of our human mortality and we carry these ashes toward Easter. As we journey through the forty days of Lent seeking to transform our hearts, remember we walk that path with Jesus and Jesus walks right alongside us. He assures us as we go, whispering these words, "Do not be afraid." Amen.