

## **Sermon – Ash Wednesday – Cathedral of the Incarnation**

**March 1, 2017**

“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near.” Joel sounds the alarm for the people of Zion some 2,500 years ago. Yet even in the face of the Lord’s return Joel reminds the ancient Israelites that the Lord stands waiting for their return, for their return with hearts for reconciliation with God. God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

The season of Lent that commences today is a season of communal and personal penitence that prepares our hearts and souls for our most holy season, that being the passion of our Lord, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In order then for us to orientate ourselves for this season we need to have a feel and an understanding of our relationship with God. Who are we in relationship to God, and who is God in relationship to us?

Through Jesus coming into the world we gained a larger insight into God’s existence and into God’s love for us. Through scripture with the accounts of the prophets and the apostles and disciples of Jesus we have testimony from witnesses and communities about God. And now through the Holy Spirit we have an advocate with God, a line of communication if we are only able to connect.

God sent Jesus as an instrument of love, compassion, and justice. Our sin becomes a disturbance in our relationship with God through our faith in Jesus. Our fallenness, our brokenness, our constant repeating of all that stands in opposition to the essence of God, puts us away from the heart of this one crucial relationship in our lives. No other relationship exists where one half offers the full depth of love, compassion and justice. No other relationship, period!

This relationship with God is the core of our creation, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. Our acknowledgement is within our own power. God is a constant in this relationship but we are not. So we need a reminder to realign ourselves with God’s creative intention.

This is the season. This is the season that is our annual reminder. This is the season that has been repeated for centuries in the church. By your participation here today you join with millions around the world in seeking to realign your lives with God. God has freely offered us the grace of reconciliation through Jesus Christ and it is now up to us to respond with penitence and obedience, and with hearts desiring a deeper connection.

Paul reminds us not to accept this grace in vain but to do something with it, to respond appropriately. To do it now! “See now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation,” he says. There are no barriers to God’s grace but our own. By being here today and reverently entering into this season of Lent we are commended as servants of God, Paul says, through our

endurance, hardships, sleepless nights, by patience, genuine love, truthful speech and the power of God.

So as we start into our Lenten journey today let the words of Jesus be carried in your hearts as a guide for each day. The words of Jesus from the Gospel according to Matthew (6:1-6,16-21) remind us that we are to remain humble and reverent in our giving of ourselves, and our gifts to the church. We are to pray in quiet where we can find God in the stillness and silence of our prayer. We are to fast in a way that does not draw attention to what we are doing.

We are also to focus our lives on the values of the kingdom – love, justice and compassion, and on our ongoing relationship with God. These are the treasures that will be most valuable to us as we live out the rest of our lives.

We are blessed that the ancient church established this holy time of penitence and reconciliation as a time of preparation for the passion of our Lord, and for his ultimate resurrection. We need this reminder every year of just what blessings we have as followers of Jesus Christ, the son of the living God. What blessing we have to believe in a God that only wants us to be in relation and to model this relationship with others. What a blessing to constantly reflect and pray about this relationship.

May this day be holy for you as you start this season here in the Cathedral. May you find space in your life for stillness before God, to allow God to be in communion with you. Take up this holy time each day as a spiritual discipline and reflect on how God is calling you into a deeper and deeper relationship.

May God bless you and keep you close.

Amen