

Sermon – Ash Wednesday – St Luke and St Matthew Brooklyn

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

“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 and for us today. 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 with the imposition of ashes 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.

To help us orientate ourselves for this season it is prudent for us to reflect on our relationship with God. Who are we in relationship to God, and who is God in relationship to us?

Through Jesus Christ 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, the apostles and disciples of Jesus, we have testimony from witnesses and communities about their relationship with 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 into the world as an instrument of reconciliation through love, compassion, and justice. Through our sinfulness though we drift away from God. Our sin becomes a disturbance in our relationship with God. 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 as God does with us. 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. The ashes that we use today are a symbol of our intention to do just that and to remind us of our fragility as organic beings that often lament the distant relationship with have 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. 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.

As we start into our Lenten journey today let the words of Jesus be carried in our hearts as a guide for each day of this season. 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 God and to the church. We are to pray in quiet where God will connect with us 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, reconciliation and compassion, and on our ongoing relationship with God and each other. 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 a blessing it is to believe in a God that only wants us to be in full relationship. What a blessing to constantly reflect and pray about this relationship knowing that the Holy Spirit is there to guide us and comfort us.

May this day be holy for you as you start this season here at the Church of St Luke and St Matthew. 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