

Hello everyone! And welcome to our Wednesday Word devotion for today, Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021. Thank you so much for tuning in, and for taking time out of your day to focus on God and focus on your faith.

Today is Ash Wednesday, the official beginning of the holy season of Lent. Lent is a season for reflection, contemplation, and recognizing the fragility and humility of human life. Lent is inspired by Jesus' time in the wilderness, tormented by demons, and struggling with the human aspects of his life. While Lent may historically have seemed depressing or sad, I don't believe it has to be. I believe that narrative about Lent is rooted in a toxic sense of positivity or our culture's false god of constantly needing to be good or fine or better or striving towards gain or betterment.

It's only by letting go of the false gods of our own invincibility that we really start to gain the fullness of the gift of our human life. When we embrace our humbleness, our deep beloved createdness by God, the fragile gift that human life really is, we find life, rather than a narrative of discarded depressiveness that has plagued this season for so long.

That's not to say I don't believe there are good or positive things to be found in the world, of course, but spending so much of ourselves thinking those are the only things worth our attention or worship or praise limits our ability to see God's actions in the world. If we only ever praise God for the good things in our lives, and just try to ignore or move as quickly away from our humbling experiences as we can, we ignore the power of the Holy Spirit who is with us even in our deepest hurts, suffering, and pains. God never shies away from the pain of what it is to be human. Jesus never ignores the complicated realities of His beloved body. And the Holy Spirit comes alongside, within, and around our humble selves no matter what, as present and life-giving as our very breath. The gift of new life promised in Jesus Christ by his death and resurrection is that much more life-savingly powerful if we realize all the suffering and torment and pain of being human that came before it. We are in need of new life and God's creation most when we are in our places of struggling, and in taking a look at the complex reality of being human. Lent provides for us a season of leaning into the human reality and how God is absolutely with us in it.

So let's embrace the humbleness of being human in this Lenten season. Be very present to the full picture of what your season currently is, and be alert to how God is still with you in the midst of it. Let's find practices that allow us to really fully rely on God, the God who created us - these beloved, fragile humans made of dust and who will return to dust one day too. Let's let go of striving for perfection, holding up the false god of toxic positivity, and embrace a spiritual practice in their place, that connects you to God and the new life promised in Christ Jesus.

The practices we do in each of these devotions, prayer and scripture, are great places to start if you need a spiritual practice to try in your life. When the pandemic began, I started praying every time I washed my hands (a zillion times a day), the water serving as a reminder of baptism and I simply thought of the names of people and situations in need of prayer. Spiritual practices can be as straightforward and woven into our everyday lives as this. I've also started more regularly engaging in breath prayers and centering prayers, involving my body and breath,

knowing they are not separate from my experience as a human being. If you need suggestions or encouragement on finding a Lenten spiritual practice, please feel free to reach out. I'd be more than happy to pray and discern with you where the Spirit is calling you to deepen your relationship with God, in this season and beyond. Also, feel free to share with and encourage your fellow sisters and brothers in Christ in their spiritual practices in this season. Check in and see how they're doing and how God is present in their lives. In connecting with our fellow humble, beloved humans, we become closer to Christ too, in the communion of saints, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So to wrap up today, dear friends, I will read the traditional Psalm associated with Ash Wednesday, a blessed reminder written by a fellow human, of their experiences with God. And we will end with a prayer.

Take a deep breath, and listen to these words of Psalm 51:

Have mercy on me, O God,

according to your steadfast love;

according to your abundant mercy

blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,

and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions,

and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,

and done what is evil in your sight,

so that you are justified in your sentence

and blameless when you pass judgment.

5 Indeed, I was born guilty,

a sinner when my mother conceived me.

6 You desire truth in the inward being;

therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;

wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Let me hear joy and gladness;

let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

9 Hide your face from my sins,

and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,

and put a new and right spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me away from your presence,

and do not take your holy spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,

and sustain in me a willing spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

The Word of the Lord.

Let us pray:

Lord God, meet us here, in our humanness, humbleness, deep need for you, O Lord. Have mercy on us, O God. Where we have done wrong, forgive us and help us to do what's right. Where we worship false gods, lead us to your way, truth, and life. Where we are hurting, comfort and strengthen us. Help us to love you and love our neighbors in thought, word, and deed. Bring us close to you in this Lenten season and throughout our lives. In your name, Lord Jesus Christ, and in unity with the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Go in peace dear friends, God is with you. Amen.