

Ash Wednesday 2019

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 March 2019

Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So Ash Wednesday is kind of a weird day, isn't it?

We get ashes smeared on our foreheads, and we talk at length about death and decay and human wickedness. It's a holy day, but we don't find ourselves exchanging gifts, other than exchanging the reminder that we're all going to die, and the reminder that in this fallen world, every single one of us has a terminal condition.

Particularly, I always find it striking every year, because it is impossible for me to evade those uncomfortable truths when I put ashes on my baby's forehead with a reminder that she is dust and will return to dust.

We are dealing with heavy stuff today, but that's alright. One of the things that I love about Christianity is that it is honest and open about hard truths, about the reality of death, about the wickedness of the human heart, about the difficulty of living in a fallen world, about the fact that Satan is real, that we really do have an enemy who seeks to devour and destroy souls.

[1:50] The Christian faith refuses to pretend that the darkness isn't there, or that things are okay when they really aren't.

The darkness is there, and the darkness is so thick that we could never rescue ourselves from it. No, what we believe as Christians is that the darkness is real, that human beings are captive to it, but that there is a light that shines in the darkness, and his name is Jesus.

We believe that he can rescue us from the darkness of sin, and the darkness of death, and the darkness of captivity to the evil one.

When we are reminded, on Ash Wednesday, and throughout the duration of Lent, of our mortality and our sin, we are reminded for a reason. That is so that we take the opportunity to repent, and that we trust all the more in Christ for our salvation.

And I was preparing for today's sermon. I was reminded that the Anglican priest, John Newton, who wrote the hymn Amazing Grace, once said this as he was getting older.

[3:17] Newton said, That's our theme for today, brothers and sisters.

We are great sinners, and Christ is a great Savior. That realization should drive us to our knees in repentance, and into the merciful arms of Christ in faith.

So I want us to look at a portion of our psalm appointed for today, Psalm 103, for us to consider our dilemma, and the benefit that we have in Christ as we embark on these days of Lent.

Starting in verses 1 and 2 in Psalm 103, we read this, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Today, I encourage us both to bless the Lord and to remember that we are dust.

[4:32] Today, I encourage us to remember that we are dust, and that we forget not the benefits of the Lord that we never forget what he has done for us, that we never forget that the light does indeed shine in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.

Let's reflect on these benefits with the psalmist. Verse 3, We are instructed to bless the Lord who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases.

The Lord forgives our iniquity, and the Lord heals our diseases. Today, Ash Wednesday of all days, we cannot forget our iniquity, we cannot forget our diseases, we cannot forget that we have sinned, and that the wages of sin is death.

In case we are tempted to forget it, it is about to be written on our foreheads in black ash. Today, we do remember our sin, and we do grieve, because sin is something that should cause us to

grieve.

But today, as we grieve, we cannot forget that there is a cure for the guilt and disease of sin. And that's all the more amazing when we realize that our problem with sin is a two-fold problem.

[6:01] It makes us guilty before God, and it exercises power over us, like a sickness that we cannot get rid of. But there is a cure for this problem, for the guilt and the power of sin, and that cure is the blood of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

While we think today on how we have fallen short, and how we have given in to sin, let us remember all the more that the blood of Christ is able to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. I want us to seriously reflect and ask ourselves. I ask you, and I ask myself, do you have something on your conscience today?

Take this opportunity today when our sin is staring us in the face and we can't forget about it even if we try. Take this opportunity to confess it to God.

And to receive the promise of forgiveness that is found in Jesus Christ. Do not leave this place today without unburdening your conscience before the Lord. Without confessing to Him the sin that is weighing on you.

[7:19] Knowing that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. Or did you come here today with sin that is clinging to you, that it seems you don't want to let go of, where maybe it seems like the sin doesn't want to let go of you.

Maybe it seems that you have sin in your life, maybe even a pattern of sin in your life that has power over you. But I want us all to know today that God is able to cleanse us and to set us free from sin's power over us.

So will you ask Him through the blood of Christ our Lord and by the power of the Holy Spirit to set you free? Will you ask the Lord to forgive your iniquity and heal all your diseases because He will? To help you. You know, my guess is that all of us today need to repent, to seek God's forgiveness and to ask Him to give us the grace to lead holy lives that are honoring to His holy name.

I don't know about you, but I have fallen short in that regard. So do not leave here today. I'm saying this for myself as much as I am for anyone else.

[9:02] Do not leave here without from the heart repenting of your sin and turning to Christ. He will forgive us. He will cleanse us. We may be great sinners, but Christ is a great Savior.

Savior. It is amazing enough that He promises to forgive our sins. It is amazing enough that He promises to heal us from sin.

But He promises even more than that to all who repent and believe the gospel. We read in verse 4 where we are instructed to bless the Lord who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

I've got to say, thinking about going down into the pit is pretty much avoidable today, isn't it?

Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.

That is blunt. We're going to die. We are going to go down into the grave. That is true of every single one of us.

[10:20] Even if we are Christ, in Christ, we will not suffer eternal death, but we will go down into the grave and our bodies will return to dust unless, of course, the Lord returns before that happens.

We are dust. We will return to dust. But for the Christian, there is something else we should always remember, and that is this, that God will redeem us from the pit.

We will go down into the grave, but we should never doubt that since Christ is risen, we will get back up. We have sinned.

We have fallen short of God's glory. We are dust, and we will return to dust. But for the Christian, we must never forget that it is the love and the mercy of God and Jesus Christ that will have the final word over us, not sin and not death.

Today, we hold two things in tension, two truths at the same time.

[11:37] We are great sinners. We will see a reminder of that fact in the ashes that we are about to receive on our foreheads to remind us of our mortality, that we will return to dust and that we will return to dust because we have sinned.

But we also get a reminder today that Christ is a great Savior. What image do the ashes that we wear take? It is none other than the image of the cross.

We get a reminder that we're going to die and a reminder of our salvation in Christ all at the same time. But that, I would say, is fitting.

Think about what our Savior went through to accomplish our salvation. Suffering and death for us. We are dust and we will return to dust.

but we have a Savior who died and rose again who defeated death for what reason? In order to share his victory over sin and death with us.

[13:01] We, it is true, are great sinners. But Christ is indeed a great Savior. It's true, we are dust and will return to dust.

But we have a Lord who is able to raise dust to new life. So this Ash Wednesday, this link. Let's ask for the Holy Spirit, for the grace to repent more deeply than we ever have before.

Let's ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to trust in Christ more than we ever have before. As we are reminded of our sin, as we are reminded of death, let us also remember the benefits that we have in Christ Jesus.

We have forgiveness, we have healing, we have eternal life. Let's remember that the light of Christ shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it.

Because we may be great sinners, but Jesus Christ is a great Savior. Let's remember that if we are being honest, we have failed and fallen short.

[14:15] But let us also remember that Jesus came for people just like us. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.