

February 17, 2021: Ash Wednesday
First Lesson: Psalm 51: 1-17
Gospel Lesson: Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21
Sermon Series: Heart to Heart
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

We are beginning our journey today of Jesus's mission towards Jerusalem with Ash Wednesday.

- And for those who wonder why we begin with Ash Wednesday; is because it prepares us for the Lenten journey.
- Ash Wednesday emphasizes a dual encounter that occurs in our physical existence; where you and I are invited to confront our own mortality;
- We are invited to confront the fact that as it pertains to our earthly body; from dust we came; from dust we shall return;

- We are invited to confront this idea that everything that most of us tend to treasure here on earth as it pertains to physical possessions will not last always;
- This is why there is this sense of urgency that this part of our liturgical calendar invites us to consider;
- The need for you and I to confess our sins or hangups before God within the community of faith; so that we can be free to live our life on Earth as in heaven;
- So that we may begin to live our lives with intentionality and purpose; that reflect this idea that although our earthly bodies will return to dust at some point;
- Our Spirits will not only live on when we pass on; what makes us...us....can truly begin to operate out of our spiritual gifts right now;

- Think about it.....most of us tend to operate in our own silos where we have our routines; where we have our people that we do things with; where we have our jobs; where we have our list of things that need to get done...this is the essence of life;
- This is why I am intrigued with my stepdaughter's video game that she is obsessed with called Sims.
- Because essentially, that is what this game is all about;
- Building avatars that look like ourselves;
- Assigning our avatars jobs so that they can earn money so that they can buy their homes and furniture;
- In this Sims game, there is a plethora of outfits that you can choose for your life like avatar;
- You can make it where your avatar finds love, have children, adopt puppies; the sky is the limit;

- And you know the funny thing is that even I find some entertainment in watching my bonus daughter create this world that is so much like the world we live in today;
- I find myself enthralled with watching these life like avatars live their life; similar to how I might live my day to day life, or you may live your day to day life;
- And then it never fails, I have to at some point tell myself to snap out of this trance of watching these avatars just do what avatars do;
- **Because I have other things that I need to do;**
- Friends, that is sort of the desire as your spiritual leader that I would like us to consider as we consider what it means to live our lives in the here and the now;
- To consider **that you and I have things that we need to do;**

- **Things that** invites you and I to step outside of our day to day routines and lives; to consider how might the God within us; I'm talking about the Imago Dei; may invite us to interact in the world; with all of our spiritual gifts;
- **Things that** invites us to consider how we might continue to cultivate this kingdom on Earth as is in heaven;
- **Things that** invites us to consider how we might put our faith into action as it pertains to loving God and loving our neighbor;
- This is the preaching goal of the new sermon series that I am naming our Lenten series to be; ***Heart to Heart ;***
- To help us to develop what I call a spiritual intelligence.

- According to an article I came across entitled Spiritual Intelligence; Education and Training in a higher Consciousness; by Richard Griffiths;
- Spiritual intelligence is a higher dimension of intelligence that activates the qualities and capabilities of the authentic self (or the soul), in the form of wisdom, compassion, integrity, joy, love, creativity, and peace.
- So you have your IQ which is our intellectual intelligence; EQ is our emotional intelligence;
- Spiritual intelligence then is when our IQ and EQ are brought together and magnified by the power of presence.
- **So part of the Lenten journey that I am proposing is for us to consider how to begin to develop our spiritual intelligence;**
- ***For in*** this journey, I believe that things will be revealed to us that we need to do as a community

of faith; as human beings that inhabit this Earth;
and it will take being able to tap into this spiritual
intelligence for us to truly be able to identify this;

- In many ways looking back; our Awakening series that we just completed a couple of weeks ago was designed for us to develop our spiritual intelligence;
- The small groups that we participate help us to develop our spiritual intelligence.
- The sermons hopefully will help us to develop our spiritual intelligence.
- Learning how to develop our prayers, presence, gifts service and witness; you probably already guessed where I am going with this; helps us to develop our spiritual intelligence;
- For I don't know about you church, but I have experienced a lot of Ash Wednesday services in my life;

- I have preached a lot of Ash Wednesday services in my life;
- Like many of you, I have done a lot of Lenten fasts in my day with the hope of forming a deeper connection with God;
- I have listened to a lot of Easter sermons and thanks to you allowing me to serve as your senior pastor, I have preached an Easter sermon myself;
- But in all of that if I am honest; the Lenten thrill wears off once Easter comes and goes;
- Where the next thing I begin to think about is summer vacations, and spending time with friends and family...and that is all good....
- I don't want us to stop doing these kind of things... because that is life right?
- But a level of awakening has struck me in a way that I am seeing things differently;

- That there is also a life where people are not being seen;
- As I am wrapping up my final paper for my preaching course as it pertains to matters of social justice;
- And as we are still navigating what will hopefully soon become the end of our pandemic crisis;
- There is something tingling in the back of my mind reminding me **to pay attention;**
- **To pay attention** to how things can quickly get out of hand when we don't pay attention;
- **To pay attention** to the fact that if any part of this world is in a crisis due to sickness, food insecurity, poverty, natural disasters and more;
- That this is something that we must pay attention to; for not only is it part of the commandment of Jesus that we pay attention to it;

- I am recalling the Ubuntu philosophy again that when one of us is not ok, then none of us are ok;
- Similarly scripture echoes this in 1 Corinthians 12:26; where it says “ if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored; all rejoice together with it.”
- For the way the world is designed reflects that we are all interconnected and interdependent;
- Nothing happens in isolation!
- So yes you and I can enjoy our summer vacations with our families and more;
- But we must also pay attention and stay connected with what is going on around us and most importantly be concerned;
- **We must pay attention and be concerned** with what is happening in our communities;
- **We must pay attention and be concerned** with what is happening in our government;

- **We must pay attention and be concerned** because this is how we begin to embody what it means to love God and love neighbor;
- This is the essence of our Heart to Heart series that we will dive into Sunday;
- Taking each scripture week to week; that will give us a glimpse of what **Jesus was paying attention to and being concerned about**; all the while helping us to develop a strong spiritual intelligence within ourselves; this I believe gets us that much closer to being able to live at our reconciling mission statement;
- A statement that affirms all beings as being sacred and worthy;
- A statement that undergirds how we achieve this “kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven.”
- A statement that recognizes as Christine Marie Smith in her book “Preaching for Justice,” names;

that “all living organisms in the universe are connected and vying for life.”

- Our mission is to help people discover the life that God wishes for us all to have;
- A life of love;
- A life of equity;
- A life of infinite possibilities;
- A life of Resurrection on Earth in the now and hereafter!
- I am imagining during our Lenten journey together, we will embark upon a number of issues that affect our community and world; that will open up dialogues amongst one another that will be energizing, thought provoking and more; Revealing to us the way forward;
- Helping us to begin to formulate ideas on the work that we can do to help address some of the issues we have learned about over these next few weeks.

- I'll let you in on a little secret;
- That the meaning of Ash Wednesday has always been a bit sobering for me;
- For the idea that our earthly bodies will become dust is something that I don't want to think about right now if I am honest;
- Especially since the world as a whole has encountered enough death when I think about all of the lives lost to the pandemic, race relations, violence and more;
- There is one thing that the incidents that I have named and the Lenten journey can invite us to think about from another perspective though, is considering what would the world look like if you and I stepped out of our day to day lives to pay attention...and I mean really pay attention?
- What would our communities look like if we took this time to really get to the heart of the mission

that Jesus took upon himself and explore how that might speak to us today?

- What would the world look like if each and everyone of us took it upon ourselves to concern ourselves with matters as it pertains to human sacredness and worth?
- What would the world look like if we spent the time to develop our spiritual intelligence, so that we may be able to get that much closer to being able to see the unseen; that is the essence of our faith in a God that welcomes and loves all of us;
- Perhaps this is the wisdom behind our Matthew text inviting us not to store up for ourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.

- **Perhaps entering our lenten journey with this intentionality and purpose will help us to really identify where our true treasure is!**