

Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalm 51

2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Sermon Ash Wednesday

God Wants to Reconnect with Us

Last night we indulged in pancakes soaked in maple syrup and butter. Topped with strawberries and whipped cream (**Image**). Maybe even some chocolate chips. Some of us enjoyed a side of sausages with our entre.

Tonight, we start our forty-day fast away from these delicious treats. Tonight, we start a forty-day journey where we reflect on our addictions, our excesses, our failures, our short-comings. All those parts of ourselves that become a distraction. All those parts of ourselves that turn our focus away from God, and onto ourselves.

Tonight, we are invited to reflect on our relationship with God. To repent where our addictions, excesses, failures, and shortcomings have hurt this relationship. To give thanks for the grace we receive that strengthens this relationship.

Tonight, God is inviting us to turn our attention back towards God. To reconnect with God. To receive ashes on our forehead in the sign of a cross as a way of reconnecting with our humility (**Image**). As a way of reconnecting with our dependence on God. So, to trust in God more with our everyday lives.

Tonight, we receive the gift of communion as a means of God's grace (**Image**). A gift that reassures us that we are forgiven. A gift that renews us, and empowers us to follow Christ. Empowers us to stay connected to God. A gift that reassures us that even though we fail to put God first in our lives, God puts us first.

Tonight, our Lenten journey for 2022 begins. Tonight, we look to Lent as an opportunity to reconnect with those essential practices of faith that draw us nearer to God's presence.

In our gospel this evening, Jesus talks about some of these practices as a way of us drawing nearer to God.

In fact, Jesus gets frustrated when people turn these practices into an opportunity for selfish acclamation. An opportunity to focus on themselves. According to Jesus, these practices were never meant to turn our attention away from God. But, to turn our attention towards God.

For example, giving in secret turns our attention away from our own selfish obsession with status, and turns our attention back on God. The one who we trust to provide us with everything we need. So, that we can love others as God loves us. Helping those in need.

Praying in private turns our attention away from that need to have power or authority over someone (**Image**). That need to put on a show. And instead, turns our attention back towards God who longs to listen to us. Whom cares about our feelings and concerns. Whom wants to have a conversation with us. Isn't communication one of the most important ways we nurture our relationships?

Fasting from those things that we have come to rely on turns our attention away from these things, and helps us see that we need to rely on God for our wellbeing (**Image**).

Jesus goes on to warn us about depending too much on the material things in life. Over time they fall apart. They rust. They get stolen. They cost too much to keep. Material things are perishable things.

On the other hand, our relationship with God is imperishable. God's grace is imperishable. When we depend on God for our wellbeing, we are depending on something that doesn't fall apart. That can't rust. That is unable to be stolen away. That was paid for by God through Jesus.

Lent is where we listen closely for the invitation to reconnect with our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier through fasting, prayer, giving, and worshipping. To turn our attention away from ourselves, and back towards God. To put our trust in God's gracious love. God's imperishable gracious love.

Let us pray, loving God, we are sorry when our self-centered ways get in the way of loving you. We are sorry when we depend on the material things in life for our wellbeing instead of depending on you for our wellbeing. Turn our hearts back towards you. So, that we may trust in your gracious imperishable love for our wellbeing. **Amen.**

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