



From the Desk of Pastor Meyer

"Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return." This somber intonation is spoken on Ash Wednesday as I place the namesake mark on your forehead or hand. It's a direct reference to what was spoken over Adam after the Fall, the final sentence of the curses caused by the forbidden bite. "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust and to dust you shall return," (Genesis 3:19). It's a bit of a linguistic pun for Adam's name: Adam, the man, will return to *adamah*, the dirt and dust, from which God created him. That brief sentence is a prelude to the sentence spoken at the graveside: "Ashes to ashes and dust to dust."

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the season of Lent, forty days from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. When counting, Sundays are excluded because Sunday is always a celebration of Easter. Thus, they are referred to as the Sundays in Lent, never the Sundays of Lent. The number 40 is derived from Jesus' wilderness fasting and temptation (Matthew 4: 1-11) where He faces Satan's temptation of hunger (turn the stone into bread), faith (jump off the Temple), and servitude (bow down and worship). At the core of each temptation is Jesus' trust in the Father's love, as though Satan was asking Jesus, "Your Father led you out here to face me...do you really believe He loves *you* if He did that to His Son? Do you still trust Him?"

Occasionally, one hears of "giving something up" for Lent. Traditionally, this was a fast of some form – our Roman Catholic friends have the tradition of meatless Fridays; others have a more stringent practice of fasting, that is, not eating anything for one day each week. The purpose is two-fold: a reminder of Jesus' 40-day fast in the wilderness, but also to serve as a spiritual and physical discipline of controlling the body. Others do the exact opposite and "take something up," doing something special or giving an additional financial gift to a charity as a mark of pious sacrifice or servitude towards others. This is in remembrance of Jesus' servitude as the Suffering Servant.

Of course, we know Lent draws to a climactic end at the cross where Jesus dies, uttering "It is finished" with His dying breath. What is the antecedent of "it?" What is "it" referring to? Most people think it's Jesus' life – with it being His dying breath, his life (it) is finished. Some think it's a reference to His misery – when He dies, the pain and suffering (it) stops. There may be other interpretations as well. I don't think it's any of these.

I think "it" refers to God's plan of salvation for the sins of the world. "It" required Jesus' innocence in life and death to take our place, the perfect Lamb of God for sinful people. "It" was the ultimate sacrifice of His holy blood poured out for us, a completion of the Old Testament sacrificial system, a propitiation-substitution-covering of our sins. "It" then also

becomes the defeat of satan, death and the grave, and thus the curse of “from dust you are to dust you shall return,” is broken.

Remember: Scripture tells us that Jesus’ body, even after a three-day burial, suffered no decay. There was no body-to-dust transformation. Instead, there was resurrection.

This is the promise that awaits God’s people, by grace, through faith in the crucified and risen Jesus. The resurrection, the raised-and-glorified body of Jesus, stands as evidence, the receipt, if you will, that the Father accepted Jesus’ redemption of His life for ours. And because of Christ’s death-payment, our sins are no longer held against us. You are redeemed, set free, with all sin-and-death debts paid in full by Jesus.

“Every morning is Easter morning from now on,” the Christian duo Avery and Marsh sang. “Every day is resurrection day; the past is over and gone.” Even though we travel through this forty-day season of Lent, with its somber tones and weighty themes connected with Jesus’ Passion, there is always the heartbeat of the resurrection within us. We are Easter people, filled with resurrection hope and promise because of Jesus.

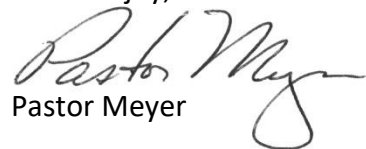
Join us on the Wednesdays of Lent at 7pm as we follow the Passion of Jesus. There is a light meal served beforehand. Come, have a bite and share in the conversation, and then stay and hear the Lord’s promises for you as His Lenten and Easter people.

In a completely unrelated note, March 18 marks the 5th anniversary of our Covid lockdown in 2020. How quickly the world changed those first weeks of the pandemic! How our world has changed since then, as well. When the pandemic was officially declared “over” in May, 2023, I wrote and submitted a piece to a couple of publishers (it was rejected) saying that as we remember the 4th of July, 9-11, and Veteran’s Day, we should mark March 18 to remember those who fought the good fight in hospitals, schools, nursing homes, living rooms, and other places, all trying to do the best we could under terrible, difficult circumstances. It should also be a national day of mourning as we remember the countless thousands who died from the terrible virus. “Ashes to ashes,” indeed. *Lord, preserve us from such a thing, again!*

Finally, as I write this, I have not yet made a decision about the Call to First Evangelical Lutheran in Orange Grove. I’m including my letter announcing the call for the purpose of Zion’s historical record. I will have a decision soon – maybe by the time you read this. In the meantime, I thank you for your prayers and words of encouragement. Remember: whatever the decision, this is the Lord’s Church and He provides always for His people. He is faithful, and He will do it. Amen.

I pray the Lord’s blessings to you as we enter these holy days of Lent.

Peace & joy,


Pastor Meyer