

Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:1-12

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

John 8:1-11

I often wonder what became of the woman.  
The woman we heard about in the gospel reading.  
The woman caught in the very act of adultery  
The woman dragged by the scribes and Pharisees and made to stand before Jesus  
The woman who waited - alone, exposed, vulnerable, condemned - waited to hear what Jesus would say

I often wonder what Jesus wrote in the dust of the ground  
What pictures he drew or words he spelled out  
What doodles he scribbled  
What thoughts he had as he stood up and faced the woman's accusers

I often wonder what the scribes and Pharisees felt  
As they saw him writing on the ground  
As they heard his words "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone"  
As they looked at Jesus  
As they looked at the woman  
As they looked at each other  
As they looked deep into their own hearts

I often wonder what the woman thought as she watched them leave  
One by one; Slowly and quietly; Till none were left  
As she heard Jesus' words - Has no one condemned you? Neither do I condemn you  
And then as she heard him say - Go on your way and from now on do not sin again

I often wonder what became of that woman.

We just don't know

But I like to think this was a life defining moment for her

One moment she was looking at death in the face  
The next moment she was being offered life and hope

And I like to think that she grabbed that offer of life and made that new start.

Having heard Those words of Jesus

Neither do I condemn you  
Go on your way and from now on do not sin again

I guess for each of us in some way Ash Wednesday is a day for facing up to reality  
we each have come here tonight for different reasons  
perhaps motivated by an inner voice, a feeling, a compulsion.

Pondering on our pasts;  
The things we could have done better  
The things we wish we could go back and change  
The things that maybe still haunt us  
The habits that we simply cannot conquer  
the things that hold us back in life, and the things that make God sad

And like the woman tonight we are given a new opportunity  
A promise that the future does not have to be like the past  
That there is forgiveness; there is hope;

Soon we will hear words not dissimilar to those the woman heard

*Remember that you are but dust and to dust you shall return  
Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ*

What does that being faithful to Christ mean for us though?

I think it means making Jesus the focus of our lives  
That all we are – all we think, all we say, all we do will please him

Maybe the fact that today is also Valentines Day might give us some clues in understanding what  
this being faithful the Christ might mean

We want to please the one we love  
We want to make them happy by what we do, what we say and who we are  
We want them to be the centre of our lives

Anyone who has been in love will know how love can transform us  
Change the way we look at life  
Change the way we see ourselves  
Change our futures ; change our very selves

SO what we are being called to do in being faithful to Christ is surely to love Jesus; to love God  
With all our heart, mind, soul and strength. To put Jesus at the centre

So as we think about those words, as we think about being faithful to him, putting him at the  
centre of our lives lets listen to Jesus be the centre

**Blessing the Dust**  
*For Ash Wednesday – Jan Richardson*

All those days  
you felt like dust,  
like dirt,  
as if all you had to do  
was turn your face  
toward the wind  
and be scattered  
to the four corners

or swept away  
by the smallest breath  
as insubstantial—

did you not know  
what the Holy One  
can do with dust?

This is the day  
we freely say  
we are scorched.

This is the hour  
we are marked  
by what has made it  
through the burning.

This is the moment  
we ask for the blessing  
that lives within  
the ancient ashes,  
that makes its home  
inside the soil of  
this sacred earth.

So let us be marked  
not for sorrow.  
And let us be marked  
not for shame.  
Let us be marked  
not for false humility  
or for thinking

we are less  
than we are

but for claiming  
what God can do  
within the dust,  
within the dirt,  
within the stuff  
of which the world  
is made  
and the stars that blaze  
in our bones  
and the galaxies that spiral  
inside the smudge  
we bear.