

Here we are, Ash Wednesday, the beginning to our 40-day season of lent, a season of intentional reflection, of deliberate turning—turning away from certain things, and perhaps more importantly turning toward other things. Turning toward God. Re-turning to the Lord our God, as the prophet Joel says, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Tonight, is about movement, about our taking a step towards God, one step, maybe more, in loving and grateful response to God who has taken several steps towards us. Tonight, we move, as we both symbolically and authentically receive a mark of God's blessing, a mark of God's love, a mark of God's forgiveness, a mark of God's radical acceptance.

This mark, traced on our foreheads later tonight, a dark smudge that suggests the bleak nature of our sinful selves, this mark is actually not bleak at all. For this dark smudge, will be traced over the exact place where the cross of Christ first marked many of us as we emerged from the waters of our baptism. It will be traced over the exact spot where many of us remind ourselves and are reminded of God's blessings that we have received, God's blessings that we can share, God's blessings that we are. This, too, is a movement. We make this move, we re-create this gesture whenever we can—as a twofold reminder. First, that we are dust, and to dust we shall return; but also that we are named, claimed, chosen, welcomed, loved by God. I invite you now to make that movement right now. Go ahead, trace the cross on your forehead. Remember your baptism. Prepare the place where the cross of ash will go—remember the promise.

Last year on Ash Wednesday, Pr Hannah used as some lines from a song by Green Day in her sermon. Following her lead, I want to also reflect on the movement of this day with a song by another rock band. Some of you know I'm a huge fan of the band Switchfoot. They're a band made up of practicing Christians from San Diego who happen also to be surfers. The name Switchfoot refers to a surfing move, where the surfer turns their whole body by switching feet, turning completely around to face the other direction, to reorient oneself. That movement is a great symbol, actually, of what Lent is all about. An intentional movement, turning oneself completely around, turning and re-turning to God. The biblical Greek word for this kind of full-body reorientation is *Metanoia*, often translated as repentance. Repentance, not as simply saying you're sorry, but turning your whole life around, turning and returning toward God.

So one of Switchfoot's best-known songs is called "Dare You To Move," and believe it's a fitting reflection on some of what is going on in Ash Wednesday, as we begin our Lenten Movement toward God. The first verse begins with the words:

Welcome to the planet
Welcome to existence
Everyone's here
Everybody's watching you now
Everybody waits for you now
What happens next
I dare you to move....

I think of this as a song about birth. It might also be about creation, or even about baptism. The beginning of new life—waiting to see what happens next, daring us to make the next move.

The song continues with a second verse about more of the tensions and troubles of life:
Welcome to the fallout
Welcome to resistance
The tension is here
Between who you are and who you could be
Between how it is and how it should be

And then the chorus again:
I dare you to move
I dare you to pick yourself up off the floor,
I dare you to move like today never happened.

So the song begins as a story about birth, new life, innocence, possibility. From there it moves to a song about struggle, about tension and contradiction, about the person each of us is, and the person we think we could be, between the way things just are in the world and the way they should be in a more perfect world. And again, the invitation, the encouragement, the challenge to make a movement in that direction. I dare you to move.

But it's after these two verses and choruses, in the part of the song usually called the bridge that Switchfoot brings the gospel:
Maybe redemption has stories to tell
Maybe forgiveness is right where you fell
Where can you run to escape from yourself?
Where you gonna go? Where you gonna go?
Salvation is here....

This is part of the message, part of the good news of Ash Wednesday, part of the gospel inherent in the entire movement from Lent to Easter. Redemption does have stories to tell, and in this season of lent once again we will listen to one another share our faith stories, alongside stories of God's redemption in Jesus Christ. And forgiveness comes to us exactly at that place where we fall—as we are reminded that Christ is always more ready to forgive than we are to confess our sin. There is nowhere—nowhere at all—that we can run to escape from ourselves, from our past, from the sin that separates us from God and from one another; where would we go? But then again, we don't need to run anywhere to escape from ourselves. We know that in Jesus Christ salvation *is* here.

So tonight, as we recall what God has done for us in Christ Jesus, as we begin this season of looking inward and at the same time turning outward, turning toward God and returning to God, I dare you to move. I dare you to move. I dare you to lift yourself up off the floor. I dare you to move. I dare you to move. Like today never happened, today never happened before.

Receive the cross of Christ again this night on your forehead. Hear these words, that you are dust and to dust you shall return. But feel underneath that gesture, hear underneath those words this movement, these words too:

You are my beloved child.

I have called you by name. You are mine.

Salvation is here. Thanks be to God. Amen