**Ash Wednesday Genesis 3- Feb 18, 2026 - Jesse Blaine**

Good evening again everyone and uh welcome to Christ the King. If I haven't had a chance to meet you, my name is Jesse and I get to be the pastor here and it is a great joy for myself and I hope for you as well to be able to just pray with others to be able to confess with others.

We all stand under one cross as one people seeking God's grace in need of his forgiveness. There's no place for pride or self-righteousness. It is all of us casting our sins upon the cross. And it is a great joy and deeply humbling for me to be able to do that together with you.

For this message, we want or for this service, we want the liturgy to speak and the songs and the Holy Spirit to move in your hearts. And so, my job is to get out of your way as fast as possible. This is a very short message this evening. I want to give you one quick reflection. I have to say, although I've done many Ash Wednesday services, I've never sat down and deeply prayed about or thought about the idea that's in the title of this service, which is ash. I never thought to myself, what does ash really mean? What is the spiritual reality of ash? And why do they call this Sunday ash Wednesday? Why do we ash ourselves here soon in a few moments? Why do we focus so much on ash?

And when you think about ash, the spiritual reality of it is there is a deep spiritual image that is very profound for all of our lives. Ash is what remains from something that once was. Ash at the end of the day is the remnant of something that once was before, something that was of higher order, of greater beauty, something oftentimes that was living that has through fire been oxidized, broken down, denatured, fragmented, and disordered and left as a pile of ash. A tree that you can go outside and see that stretches up to the sky that bears fruit and gives shade that is filled with life once it's chopped down and sent into the fire. What's remained of that giant tree is a pile of ash. Flowers of the field that show off the great beauty and splendor of God, if they're thrown into the fire are burned, they become ash. What's left there is ash.

I'm jealous of the kids in our Sunday school this past Sunday. They got to take the palms that we waved last year on Palm Sunday, they got to take them outside and burn them. And I have to say, if I were an 8-year-old boy, it would be my favorite Sunday of the year. So, the ashes that we're going to use here in a few moments are actually the ash from the palms that we waved last year, which said, "Hosana in the highest welcome." This desire, this emotion that was thrown into that has now become ash.

Ashes testify to a reality, to something of greater beauty, higher order, real purpose, that something else was here before. Now, of course, spiritually we know that this is the story of us as individuals. This is a story of all humanity. This is the story of the world. God created us out of something inert without order and without beauty. He called it the dust. He created us out of the dust and from the dust he breathed life into us to give us order and beauty and purpose and vision. and virtue.

He calls us the crown of his creation. Out of dust, he made us the crown of the creation. The ones who would best reflect his glory into the world. And yet, when sin enters into our lives and into the world and into our souls, it acts like fire on something that's beautiful, it reduces that which God created for order and beauty, to reflect his good, and reduces it into spiritual ash.

Out of the dust, he created us to have life and not only to live but to live for him and bear his image into the world. This is what ash is. From dust we were made and to dust we shall return save for the renewing lifegiving work of God through Jesus Christ in our lives. This is the truth that we focus in on Ash Wednesday.

A few moments ago we heard a reading from Psalm 103. You can turn there if you'd like. Psalm 103 verses 8-14. I want to point out two ideas of good news that we get from this when it speaks to people who are affected by sin like all of us.

Two points of good news. First, despite God creating us out of dust, forming us, building us up, creating us in his image, giving us his authority in the world to bear out his glory and his purposes. in the world. Despite him doing all of that and us failing time and time and time again and returning to sin again and again and again, he does not look at us as a pile of dust or ash. He does not turn away from us in disgust, but he says these words to all those who know him.

Verse 8, the Lord is full of compassion and mercy, longsuffering and of great goodness. He will not always chide us, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor rewards us according to our wickedness. For he knows whereof we were made. Other versions say he knows our frame, he remembers that we are but dust. He knows that we are fragile. He knows that but except for his lifegiving spirit and him holding us together that it's easy for us to fragment. It's easy for sin to come into our lives and to create spiritual ash in our lives where we fall apart. It's no wonder that we so often feel burnt out or disintegrated or disenchanted with the world because we allow sin to turn us that which God has built up into the dust of the world.

And yet the same voice that spoke over creation to bring life into dust speaks to those of us who continue to return to our sin and speaks over us with great compassion. It says this that the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love. He does not stand over us as We're reduced with a finger of accusation pointing at us. How dare you fall back into that again? But he stoops towards us in mercy and compassion. For he remembers that we are but dust.

That's how God sees us. That's how God sees all of us in this room. Those who turn to him, he sees us in this way with great compassion as a father shows compassion on his children. So we can know this evening we'll pray some prayers that really get into our sin and really cause us to think about what's going on in our lives. But the one looking down on us that we pray to looks at us with compassion. He looks at us with love and he invites us to offer ourselves to him. That's how he looks at us. This is what he does.

Verse 11. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his mercy also towards those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he set his sins our sins from us. As a father pies his own children, so is the Lord merciful to those who fear him. In Christ, God remembers us and removes our sin from us. So that when we take time to open up our hearts and our souls to him, he is like a surgeon that removes that which disintegrates us, that which holds us down. And as the Apostle Paul says, that which entangles us from the goodness and fullness of life that he has for us. That's what this service is about. That's what the season is about. We would open up our hearts and our minds and be intentional about removing from our own lives with the help of God by his grace and his mercy the things that keep us from living the fullness of life that he has for us.

Now, when it comes to sin, there's often two ways that we get it wrong. You've probably all heard this before. One way is that we sort of brush it off and say, you know, that's not that big of a deal. Or, do you know how much stress I was under during that moment? Or Have you read the news or gone on the internet? I'm not as bad as those people over there. So, it's not that big of a deal. And so, we just sort of brush sin off.

The other way that we get sin wrong is we allow it to crush us. We allow it to enslave us. We allow the shame and the guilt to squeeze the spiritual life that God has intended for us. Both are wrong views of sin. God calls us to take it seriously and to repent and to turn to him.

But he calls us to live in freedom, to know that we are forgiven, that he looks over us with great compassion and deep love. This is the goodness of God that he has for us. So this evening, if you come up to receive a mark, know that this mark of ash is saying, "I am dust. I am fragile. I am fragmented. And without God, I am ash. But because of him, I am alive."

And let it also be a declaration that God who first breathed life into dust, remembers me with compassion, and removes all sin and shame and guilt and fear that I have within me as far as the east is from the west. God is a good God that loves us deeply. Let us respond to him then in love, humility, and grace.

Let me pray. *Lord, we thank you for your mercy that you generously show upon us time after time. How your grace is new, how your compassions are new every morning. how you love us so deeply. We ask that you would help us to be intentional and honest with you, but also to know how you see us, that you would give us eyes to see you as a loving father who meets us with grace because of the merits and work of your son, our savior Jesus Christ. We thank you deeply, Lord. Be honored and glorified this evening and turn our lives to you. Build us into the life that you have for us. In your great and holy name we pray. Amen. Amen*.