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My Siblings in Christ,

Wednesday, March 5, marks the beginning of our Lenten journey as part of the Christian tradition. As we join together in parishes near and far to mark the Ash Wednesday service, we do so recognizing that millions of people around the world are doing likewise. There is something very humbling knowing that as we receive the thumbprint of ash which traces the sign of the cross upon our foreheads, we are one of many who are hearing the words “Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

People across Canada will feel the trace of that cross. Ukrainians and Christians in war-torn countries in Africa and other places in the world will feel the trace of that cross. Those who are wondering what is happening in their own communities will feel the trace of that cross. New Christians will feel the trace of that cross in ash for the first time since they received the Chrism oil being traced in a cross at their baptism. Around the world, from continent to continent, siblings in Christ from so very many backgrounds will join with us in the solidarity of Jesus Christ’s followers, remembering where we come from and where we will return.

Ash Wednesday and the Imposition of Ashes can be a deeply painful commemoration. It can also be a profoundly moving celebration as well. As those ashes are traced upon our foreheads, we are also reminded that there was One who sacrificed himself for us. Jesus walked that first truly Lenten journey to the cross. The steps we take, the journey we make throughout this season of Lent is not one of commiseration. Our Lenten path is not one that is meant to be heart and backbreaking. It is one that asks that we might take intentional time to walk with Jesus in our hearts, remembering, appreciating, acknowledging the depth and power of the gift he has given us in his walk to the cross.

This Lenten season, in particular, is one which is different in so many ways. The world around us is shifting. The foundations of our society which we assumed were secure are coming to be seen as set on shifting sand. So very much of what we have known is now surprising. Many wonder what is stable and secure, and what is not. For every question there seem to be either too many “answers” or not enough, and this makes us uneasy. The ashes upon our foreheads remind us of the temporality of what we have.

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Yet the Truth is that the symbol the ashes make remind us of just the opposite. What we can place our absolute trust and faith in is the cross. In Christ we find our sure foundation. In Jesus' teaching and love and guidance we find the Truth the world is longing for. As those who seek to have the ashes imposed on our foreheads, the cross drawn upon our souls, we know that we are standing on solid ground. We trust that our faith is in the One who was given to us by God that we might not fear the shifting sands and the suggestions of contested answers.

I invite you to think differently about this Lenten Season. I invite you to think on those who have had the courage to speak truth to power in gentle voices, like Bishop Budde. I invite you to pray about the role of the Church – Anglican and otherwise – in being prophetic in our own country as we face an inevitable election and the pressures of the world upon our own communities. I invite you to walk your Lenten path with Jesus as your sole guide and comfort. If we choose to walk through this Lent in these ways, then we too will become beacons of hope and bearers of Truth to those around us who are scared, floundering, and seeking a better way. For we know that the real Truth is this: the cross of Christ IS the better way.

I commend to you an Ash Wednesday video which was prepared for you by the joint efforts of the Diocese of Rupert's Land, the Manitoba and Northern Ontario (MNO) Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and by our Diocese of Brandon. It can be found shared on our Diocese of Brandon Facebook page and will be available on "Church @ Home with Rachael" on Ash Wednesday.

May God bless and keep us all as we begin our Lenten journey together, and with Jesus Christ.



+ Rachael Parker