

## A Wounded Savior for a Wounded People

You heard it tonight when you came forward. Dust you are, and to dust you will return. The ashes for which this day is named show everyone that you are dying. It is a strong dose of reality that most of the time we would rather just ignore.

But then tonight we visualize Jesus—the One for whom the words “Dust you are and to dust you will return” sound so wrong. We see Him, and our heart wants to express the words we have sung: “O Sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down, now scornfully surrounded with thorns, thine only crown.” If ever there was a head that did not call for ashes, it is the sacred, holy head of Jesus.

Why thorns, when it should be a crown of gold?  
Why was He wounded, when he is the giver of life?  
He made us from the dust—why would he have to become dust?  
We will spend this season of Lent thinking about questions like these.

In tonight’s first reading, the prophet Joel declares a sacred fast. He urges the trumpet to sound and the people to gather. Why? It is time to return. Lent is always about a return to. We often think of it as a turning away from—and that’s not wrong. In tonight’s Gospel reading, Jesus assumes his disciples were going to fast. (He says “when you fast,” not “if.”) But it has to go deeper than just denying yourself a snack. Any devotional action you decide to do must ultimately be about a return to the waiting arms of God. “Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”

Jesus’ dying love and the prophet’s call are summoning you to come back to God; to return to Him now. He doesn’t want some outward display, or a few minutes tossed His way once a week. He wants you. He wants to be your deepest love.

Are you afraid of that? Do you think, “I’ve made such a mess of it all. I’ve hurt so many people. God knows how terrible my thoughts have been.” Do you feel that you’ve failed in your love for God? Failed in your love for people around you? Do you ache to do better—to have one more chance? Then there’s just one thing to do. Return. Return and see the sacred head of Jesus, wounded and hanging low. Why do that? To feel more guilt? No, just the opposite. To see in Jesus the ultimate act of love.

Not only did the Son of God become fully human; not only did He become dust for us; but He became one of us to own all our failures; to lift them off of us and die with them on His cross. Return and see that this was a great exchange. Jesus gets your spiritual illness and he gives you spiritual health. Jesus gets sentenced for your crime and He gives you a clean record and freedom.

Look to Jesus’ wounded head and see that the only real life in this world is fellowship with Him; communion with Him; and every time you have settled for less, you allowed yourself to be deceived and cheated of the greatest gift.

The call goes out tonight to return to the Table of the Lord, to come and receive your wounded healer, whose flesh is the living bread from heaven and whose blood is the cleansing agent that removes every bit of dirt from your soul.

Just this past Sunday in one of our services, a hymn was sung by our Gathering Praise Team that lays this all out in front of us. It says:

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,  
calling for you and for me;  
see, on the portals he's waiting and watching,  
watching for you and for me.

Come home, come home;  
ye who are weary come home;  
earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,  
calling, O sinner, come home!