

Good Afternoon! Grace and Peace to you all from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Lent starts today! I hope everyone had a good Fat Tuesday yesterday! There are so many traditions that have arisen around lent that we celebrate to try to do. Theirs giving something up and using that something missing as a focusing point for your faith. Theirs burying the alleluia. If you notice carefully the church almost stops saying alleluia until Easter morning. And we here are trying out these 40 acts of service this year.

We are going to be talking a lot about the 40 acts this Lenten season. So if you haven't yet sign up its not too late! You can join today! The first email was sent this morning. Our first act is to put together a list of the people around us that we want to try and help these next 40 days. You get an email every day with a random act that you are challenged to do that day. They are Acts of generosity. Acts of Kindness. Acts of stewardship. Acts of giving out of what we have been given. A

steward is just a person who has been put in charge of someone else's stuff. That is what we are here on earth. We are from dust and to dust we shall return but in between we are given everything to be used to the glory of God. Every breath we take, everything we hold in our hands, everything we touch, smell, taste, hear and see. The very seconds we live through right now, they are from our God. We are blessed. And so we bless. We have been given and so we give.

With Ash Wednesday we start a season of repentance, of preparing ourselves to hear the amazing story of Easter. This is about a continual reflection of saying to ourselves, "where do I stand with God, with my neighbors and this world." And in the midst of this we come before all of this with humility for we are but dust. How much does that put us into perspective to come before God seeking that clean heart?

We encounter God most prominently through this very act. Through our repentance and God's forgiveness. An act that works upon us and changes us, now. Again we are taking these next 40 days to

prepare ourselves to understand even a little of this divine and ultimate action that our God did for us and continues to do for us, and will continue to do for us. This action that is the hub of everything that we believe as Christians. Our God, Jesus Christ, went to the cross voluntarily, taking our sins with him, died and 3 days later rose again. God Acted and we are free now to act.

We are free to act but we so often don't want to believe that. What we want is to say that we have a say in this. That we are in control. That we can do what we want and just us who are earning our own keep here and in eternity. With that type of attitude we become the ones who are trying to sneak into the fold. We don't want to say to ourselves that we just go through the gate.

It's hard for us not to want to try to sneak into God's kingdom; to somehow sneak around the absolute need of forgiveness that we need. We want to do something to say we belong here, we earned it, we made this happen. And yet that is never the truth and that only

separates us from God. We come before God and ask for that clean heart as only God can give us and God gives us that gift. God acts, and we receive more than we could ever bargain for.

I asked our high schoolers last Sunday what would they do if I hired them and paid their entire years salary at the beginning of the job with no strings attached, what would happen. I was told, and I quote, “I would soon be out of business, that I was being foolish, that I wasn’t going to see my workers very much.” How much does this relate to us now? God acts and gives us everything, gives us forgiveness for every affront to God that we commit against God, gives it all free of charge from us. And then what, asks, asks not even requires, that we spread this message of hope, freedom, and love around this world. Asks that we join with God in the redeeming action of this world. Asks that we start doing it right now. And you better believe the time to do that is right now.

Do you think a shepherd waits? Does the shepherd say well sheep let's not go to greener pastures? Does the shepherd not stop the lion or the thief? WE know the shepherd. We know his ways. We know how to follow. We know what we are supposed to do because we trust our shepherd. Why do we trust our shepherd? Because we know what our shepherd has done for us. Our shepherd was willing to lay down his life when the wolves came prowling. Our shepherd died to protect us, to save us. Our shepherd came to give life rather than to take it or let us be taken.

We know we are blessed. And we know we have been called. Our shepherd as called us. WE know his voice. We here it every day. We see what our shepherd is doing in this world. And now we go and do likewise. Now we go and bless others. We are blessed to move in this world. Blessed to give of ourselves and what we have been given. Blessed to act out of our sure knowledge of the act that brings us forgiveness right now. We know that dust to dust is not the end of the

story, they are just a couple of mile markers that show changes in our course.

Let us live and act as fully as we possibly today, tomorrow, and until we are but dust again. Let us act with the joy that is within us. Let us act with the strength and given to us. And let us forgive as we know we are forgiven. Let us join this mighty act of our Lord Jesus Christ and together work in this world so that it might one day know our Lords true and abiding peace. The peace that comes from a good shepherd.

Amen