

Ash Wednesday 2019 Pastor Jordan Gades, Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Good evening everyone. Tonight starts our journey to the foot of the cross once again. All the way back in September we started our biblical cycle again with creation and now we reach Jesus in the midst of his ministry, in the midst of his power and glory. He's healing lepers and the lame, miraculous feedings, and calming storms and walking on water. And yet we know what will be happening soon enough. For all of this and more, tonight we come before our Lord in petition and humility.

This is not something that we like to do or do naturally. Our pride usually gets in the way of humility. It's easier for us to be proud of what we've done and be thankful of what we've been blessed with. Think of how we dress when come to church. We probably don't think about why we wear what we wear very often but when we come to church we tend to where our nicer clothes.

We tend to show respect to our Lord by wearing the things that show what our God means to us. We wear these clothes that God has amazing blessed us with. But now, now we present ourselves before God covered in ashes.

Ashes are the ultimate way of showing remorse and more asking for forgiveness. Again and again we see figures in the bible, in the midst of pain and struggle, in the midst of knowing just how badly they have screwed up, cover themselves in ashes and don "sackcloth" after literally ripping their own clothes off their body. This is meant to show something to God and to other people. It is a physical representation of what they have done. Something has happened to them now. They now know something they didn't before. They are asking for forgiveness. Their hearts have been rent back to God.

Rend your heart says the lord. Our hearts are such fickle things, so easy to sway, so rebellious to what we actually might need. Going this way and that, chasing what we want. And God says to us, who are on the brink of destruction and ruin, **rend your hearts**, wrench them free of their wandering, pull hard on them and set them back in line, put them back on the path of following your Lord.

Rend your hearts so that you may be healed. Rend your hearts so that you may truly know your God. Rend your hearts so that you may know that you are forgiven and know the undeniable love of your Creator.

Rend your heart and **Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents.** This is no small thing that God commands of us. But our Lord gives us these promises of assurance. Of Hope. How often is it when we are in the midst of pain and grief that can't or won't hear these words and promises? We tell ourselves "I have done something too horrible" "I have been doing this for too long" or that "it was so long ago" even when it eats upon us. Or we tell ourselves that the pain is too great, there is no way another can handle this pain, this suffering. But to all of these God says Rend your Heart. Reach in and wrench free that stained and poisoned heart and give it over to me. God says to us "let me rip away that suffering and leave you with peace." We all have come here this evening with those prayers on our lips. Give us peace Oh lord and now we add to it rend our hearts.

We know we are not strong enough to do this alone. We know that our hearts too easily roam and flee from what might be painful, flee from change. But know that our God is more than enough. We know that our God comes and bridges that gap between us.

For we believe that we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, or come to Him; our hearts just will not follow him but we also know that the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, sanctified and keeps us in the true faith.

Luther knew that 500 years ago, we know it now. It is our God who prevails, who overcomes, who forgives, and who loves. It is never too late.

Know this truth, we cry out, we have seen our fate without God, so we call to God now. We hear this trumpet call, now is the time to seek repentance. Now is the time to do our ashes and become before God with a penitent heart. Now we rend our hearts away from the sorrow of this world and give them back over to God.

We have heard this call but it is also time to spread it as well.

Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, consecrate the assembly... Let them say, "Spare your people, Lord.

Spare all your people Lord. There is too much pain, too much bottled up within us. This last weekend at Cardia Deo one of the High school leaders got up in front of the whole group and shared her story. Her sister was struggling with depression and suicide. And it was breaking her. She was losing her faith, getting angry with God, God had abandoned her. But somehow in and amongst all of that she came up with this idea to send her sister a bible verse every day. Sometime later, this act led to her having a deep conversation with her sister about her own faith, about her own struggles. This conversation led her to turn back to God, to see God there at every step on her journey. Her sister's depression wasn't prayed away but she and her sister's relationship was healed. Even when her heart was wavering, even in the midst of her unbelief, God was still moving and loving and healing. She learned how to lean more heavily into her relationship with God.

So I say again rend your hearts. Tear them away from the idea that your pain is only yours to bear. Let them be wrenched free of this quagmire of solitude that they have been stuck in. Rend your hearts and let them be freed by God.

Lent begins today – this holy fast is upon us. We have begun our journey by being consecrated by ash. Today we rend our hearts and receive forgiveness and healing. Amen