

## **Ash Wednesday 02/14/2024**

How can this be, Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday on the same day? The last time it happened was 2018. At first they really don't seem like they go together. Valentine's Day is supposed to be affirming love to people on all different levels of relationships. Ash Wednesday seems to be dark and gloomy and dealing true reality that we are sinners. We hear the words, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return".

Some people choose not to deal with this day. Not all people come up for ashes. It is looked at by many as the beginning of a dark and dreary season called Lent. Yes, tonight we begin the season of Lent. We do hear the words, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return".

Well then, how does this fit into Valentines Day. We think of this day as a day that we share love in many different ways to many different people. There are often cards given, candy, special meals, etc. In elementary schools, boxes are decorated, and valentines and candy are shared with class mates. Some spouses/partners try and think of something special to do or buy for the other. A day of love in which we remind others how much they mean to us.

When it comes to colors for Ash Wednesday we think of black with the ashes. With Valentine's Day we think of red and hearts. The words we hear, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return" do not sound like "I love you". I would like to propose that we are talking about different ways of showing and remembering who loves us and whom we love.

Ash Wednesday, the imposition of ashes is a ritual or symbol to remind us that God loves us. We began the service with Psalm 51. David prayed this psalm after Nathan told him a story.

David had raped a commander's wife and then had the commander sent to the front line where he was killed. Rape and murder, but David did not really see how far off he was from God's law. Thus, God had Nathan tell David a story so David could get it.

Nathan said that there was a rich man who had many animals and a nice place to live and had what he wanted. There was a poor man who had one lamb, that was more of a pet, barely a roof over his head and little to eat. The rich man had a visitor and told his servants to go and get the poor man's lamb for a feast.

David said the rich man should be killed for how he treated the poor man. Nathan said, you are the rich man. At that point David realized what he had done that was not right in God's eyes. David had surrendered his identity as God's

chosen king and betrayed the trust of the nation through rape and murder. He then prayed Psalm 51.

David was sorry for what he had done but was not able to fully comprehend the depth of his sin. He hoped God would forgive him. We hear David praying, Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew in me a right spirit. He was asking God to make him clean again.

Out of love God forgave him. God chose to forgive him. Even though David's life was never the same. He was not allowed to build the temple. On his deathbed though, he told his son Solomon not to stray from God's covenant, God's law.

At the base of all the covenants that God made with God's people are the two great commandments, You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart soul and mind, and your neighbor as yourself. We are back to love.

It's a balancing act to keep our relationship with God going as well as our relationship with others. God says the foundation of these relationships are built on love. Tonight is a night that we are reminded of God's love for us, regardless.

Once on a church sign was "Forgiveness guaranteed, repentance optional". At first we might say that no, we must repent in order to receive forgiveness. Think of it this way, forgiveness is always offered, and it is not based anything that we do or say. Forgiveness is freely offered by God in Jesus Christ. Repentance may be a response to love.

We repent and say that we are sorry for things that we do or say that creates brokenness. Even though, just as David did not comprehend the depth of his brokenness, neither can we. We repent out of love for God and each other. As human beings we often have problems forgiving, God does not as God loves us unconditionally.

Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday are both about love. Shared love between us and others and God and us. This love is expressed in different ways. Valentine's Day may be about cards, candy and many other things. Ash Wednesday is about us remembering how much God loves us unconditionally by sending Jesus and how we then respond to that love.

Could God be sharing a valentine with us tonight through unconditional forgiveness out of love?