February 23rd, 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Ash Wednesday

7pm

What can you do with Dust?

1. Lenten Loner (Marking the Journey)

When I sit down with my pastor colleagues, I often hear their

love of Lent and how this season continues to call them into spaces of the sacred and holy in profound and meaningful ways. And I nod, stoically, trying to play the part of the righteous pastor, but eventually I admit it – Lent is my least favorite season of the liturgical year.

Now, you think I’d just about get kicked out of ministry for that one, but let me explain. Advent is my favorite season, a season of waiting and hoping and dreaming and then Christ the King comes and it’s beautiful and solemn and full of joy. We sing it – joy to the world, the Lord has come. Small children with glimmers in their eyes, people in a joyful spirit, and we all gather during moonlight and lift our candles and sing Silent Night. It’s a good, happy season – it has it’s relative challenges – but it’s mostly exciting and hopeful in the midst of the cold winter.

Yet, I know I should love Lent more. Easter is considered the most holy of days in the Christian calendar, and I would still lift that up to be true. I love the day of Easter. But for me, the season of Lent and I look more like a bar fight, then a silent monastery. And it’s difficult and vulnerable to admit that, but for me, during this season, we have to deal with the most difficult of matters: mortality, death, and life again in oblique and real ways. Lent requires me to brace the difficult stories, the mistreatment of Christ, to think about his climb to Calvary, to say ‘Crucify Him’ when I don’t want to. I know I need to, but I don’t want to.

Lent pulls me into a place I don’t want to be – or, with a healthier outlook – lent doesn’t let me get away with just the Easter joy. Lent pulls me right down into the mud and into the pit and to confront the most challenging texts. It makes me sit quietly, it makes me question that hard question – why did Christ have to die – there had to be another way – but there wasn’t. Lent makes me align myself with the prophets and disciples just as much as it makes me align myself with the Roman elites and Saducees.

And while I don’t want to handle the difficult emotions, I know I need to, I know we have to – to get to that blessed Easter morning. We put ashes on one another’s head, remembering that we are mortal, finite, and yet incredibly beloved by God. We journey to the cross, because that’s the cost, that’s the call – to sit in the pew each Sunday, to sit in our living rooms and read, to take time to be silent, and to confront the reality of a dirty, messy, and painful march to the cross.

As difficult as Lent is as a season, as challenging as it could be, even if it is my least favorite – I couldn’t imagine a Church year without it. Easter morning wouldn’t mean much without it. So, I’m going to step into the uncomfortable, I’m going to sit with the texts that make me tear up. I know it’s not much of a selling point, but I hope you’ll journey with me too. Because maybe if we journey together, maybe if we face those realities that challenge us – then maybe you and I on that faithful Easter morning can begin to get a taste of what Mary must have felt when the tomb was empty. Come with me, stay with me, and let us journey through this action of marking ourselves with ashes as a way to say – we are committed, we will go together, we will journey toward that rugged cross for a glorious morning to come.