

This is an intentionally different Lent. I realize I wasn't here for Lent last year, but I think it's safe to say that this will be a different Lent for us this year. Or at least, the imagery and words we use together in worship will be different than what you may have expected. I hope they have an impact on you and your faith journey as we move through this season of intentional preparation for the glory of Easter, as we pay attention perhaps a bit more to what God is saying to us and how we respond to the promise God makes to us.

The image of being "full to the brim" stands in direct conflict with the prevailing sentiment surrounding this season. Perhaps you've spent the past few weeks thinking about or preparing yourself for what you will give up for Lent this year, thinking about the Lenten fast you will observe. And now, as we stand at the starting line for this season, the mood – while more somber than last week – is perhaps a little less...sad. The cross, while standing prominently in our worship space, is perhaps a bit less dark as it holds images of light, water, and growth.

As we come into this season our focus is not on a Lenten fast for the sake of deprivation or loss, but for the sake of focus – to center who we are and what we do where it is most important. In doing that, we open ourselves up to experience being filled to the brim and overflowing with God's love and grace. We turn inward a bit for self-reflection, not to deny the world around us and worry only about ourselves, but to strip away what is unnecessary so that we can be filled with what God has deemed most necessary – that love and forgiveness that means we are enough. With all that we are, with all that God has given us, we are enough to be God's beloved children.

It's true, that we can't observe this day, we can't receive the mark of ash on our forehead without being reminded of death and our own mortality. But in that reminder of our mortality, we are most clearly and directly reminded of the promise that God makes to us about our **immortality**. It's as if we stand here where the promises of our baptismal waters – overflowing our heads when we were younger meet the future reality that this life is finite and that one day we will be overflowing as dust.

But we bring all that reality, we bring all that we are into this place where we have stripped away all that is meaningless so that God can make us whole again. We bring all that we are, our sinful, broken selves to this place so that we can hear the promise of forgiveness once again. With that promise of forgiveness – with that reality of forgiveness in our hearts, we are ready to be marked with ash. We are ready for the reminder that we are mortal.

We are ready to be fed a foretaste of the feast to come. I can't promise that a morsel

of bread and a sip of wine will fill you to overflowing, but the promise that comes in the body and blood is a promise of fullness – a promise of grace overflowing. So that we leave this place remembering not just that we are dust...but that we are wholly and completely loved even though we are dust. And into dust, God has breathed life so that we would be an overflowing vessel of that divine love.

The creators of our theme materials this season include the Rev. Sarah Speed, a Presbyterian pastor and poet. I'll end this meditation with her poem, "On My Way."

You said return to me so here I am
skin and bones held together
with memories and a little bit of duct tape.

I am bringing the worst of me, consider yourself warned— the furrowed brow, the achy back,
the slew of judgments, a pocket full of
assumptions, the track of negativity
that runs laps in my head.

I am bringing it all because you said return to me, edits not required, so return I will.

And not all of it will be bad. Some of it will be lovely. I will bring
a wagon full of nostalgia,
a melody that won't let me go,
a million stories that start with the words,
"Oh it was beautiful!"

I will bring a mended heart, a glass half-full, two lungs, out of breath from dancing too long,
and dreams that taste like honey.

I will bring my whole messy
human self because I know, I just *know*, deep in my bones,
that you are already running to meet me.

There are no cuts on this team.

You said you'd take it all, so here I come. Me and all my humanity. We are on my way

Amen.