

Rev Sally's Sermon Ash Wednesday 2021

This year, like everything else, Ash Wednesday looks different. Not only are we virtual but we won't be wearing ashes on our foreheads this year. Social distancing makes all things different. But even if we can't wear them on our foreheads, we can bear them in our hearts.

The mark traditionally made on the forehead is in the shape of a cross. It reminds us of the cross made on our forehead at our Baptism. Then we heard the words, "You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever." This cross is made with Holy Oil, to remind us that God anoints us with his Holy Spirit, and when he does, he adopts us as his own children. We belong to God.

Lent is a time to remember that we are God's children. And if we have strayed away from our Father, we can always turn back. We can always return home.

Often during Lent we take on disciplines, practices, to help us in this turning. In the invitation to a Holy Lent, which we will hear in a few minutes, we will be called to prayer, the reading of holy Scripture, and to fasting and self-denial.

I don't know about you, but right now I'm having a difficult time with the idea of fasting. I'm having a difficult time in general. I'm stressed and worn out. I think everyone is right now. Basically, we have been fasting for the past 11 months. So, this year I'm called to a different kind of Lent. Instead of focusing on penitence and reform, I want my Lent to be another kind of turning, a turning from despair to hope. I want to remember that no matter what I am facing, I am God's child. I wear the cross of Jesus on my forehead and in my heart. And I want you to know that you do too.

I do urge you to take on some practices this Lent that will draw you closer to God. Pray – open your lives to God. Invite him to be part of your life. Listen to his loving voice that will lead you in the way that gives life. Read Holy Scripture. These are words of wisdom and truth that have been handed down through centuries to the faithful. These are words that have spoken God's peace in the past and will speak again to our lives. And this year you might try a different kind of fasting. A friend of mine from seminary, Kathy Price, put together this list years ago. Fast from Self-

pity; feast on joy. Fast from bad temper and impatience; feast on gentleness. Fast from resentment; feast on contentment. Fast from selfishness; feast on serving others. Fast from Fear; feast on hope. Fast from doubt; feast on faith. You get the idea. Look at your own life and ask what you would like less of in your life and what you would like to have much more of.

My hope is that this year Lent will be a season of growth. I hope it will help me learn more about what it means to be a child of God. I hope it will allow me to stretch myself in new ways. And I hope that it will teach me to let go of anxiety and despair and to open myself to receive divine hope and joy. After all, I am a child of God. I wear Jesus' cross on my forehead and in my heart. And this is reason to rejoice.