

# Ash Wednesday Sermon: Feb 22, 2023

*Rick Pearce*

**O God, you have made us for yourself  
And against your love there is no defense  
Mark us with your love  
And release in us a passion for your justice  
In our disfigured world  
That we may turn from our guilt and face you  
Our heart's desire.**

**Amen**

**Janet Morley**

I am dust we have just established, and so are you.

I want to make a Lenten suggestion, one piece of dust to another.

It is typical to give up something for Lent and that is a fine discipline teaching us humility and simplicity. So, if you want to give up something this lent that is great. But, I have a different suggestion.

I would invite you to come to church whether virtual or in person and be aware... to increase your awareness of this place, its people, and its love.

Let me explain:

This is a sensual place — sights, smells, touches and tastes. Sunlight through stained glass, voices lifted in song, the feel of books in our hands, the subtle smell of candles burning. I invite you to experience this. Look for things you have not been aware of, perhaps the stained glass in the choir loft, a young couple holding hands, an old couple holding hands, someone silent with their eyes closed, a child fidgeting, an adult fidgeting, someone weeping, another comforting them. The image of Laurel Mosteller leading a line of little children back from their Godly play, like little ducks. I invite you to experience this and become more aware.

There is a depth to this place. When people come to your house for a party, they experience a house, but it is a house that has been cleaned up, picked up and prepared. So, it is here, you see the church, and looking deeper you see it cleaned, you feel its warm heat in the winter, you see the altar guild putting out the linens, the acolyte lighting the candles. You hear the result of the choir practicing, you experience the results the secretary and priest preparing the leaflet, organizing our worship together. Online you magically push a few buttons and are connected to this service. But, please realize that PJ and Mike and others work hard every week to offer you this experience. I invite you to experience this and become more aware.

We engage in our liturgy together from our book of common prayer, from the Holy Scriptures, from our song, from our participation and activity, the result of two thousand years of creativity and thought, beautiful building up and horrible, sometimes violent mistakes that somehow combine to bring us into flowers; here in Glenside at St. Peter's today. A fantastic and flawed institution struggling to help fantastic and flawed individuals by the power of the Holy Spirit. The result at St Peter's is a flowering of this history, tradition, and the Holy Spirit similar to and different from all the other flowers of our church. I invite you to experience and be aware of our unique flowering of Christianity here and now as it is — experienced.

During the week, you could picture Rev. Barb talking to people about more topics than you could ever possibly imagine. Also, taking place are Wednesday healing services, Tuesday book study/ morning church, Zoom listening circles, EFM, community activities in our buildings and more committees than I can count. I invite you to experience our church and become more aware.

We see a tube of toothpaste collected here for the students of St. James School, looking deeper, we see a struggling family who needs to put their limited resources into things other than toothpaste, now receiving this simple gift that can help to maintain their health; beyond that awareness we see a small but meaningful sacrifice of some parishioner in buying toothpaste, in the connection to St. James school and its students and the wisdom to make these connections... Look even deeper and we see the children of our parish watching what we do and learning about love guided by wisdom, the Holy Spirit in action. Be aware of our

actions helping people stay warm, of new babies receiving new clean clothes, of hungry neighbors humbling themselves to find needed food at the back door of our church. Other folks get needed clothes and other items for a few dollars at our rummage sale. I invite you to experience this and become more aware.

Looking at ourselves: as we relate to St. Peter's: perhaps we find our own need for love, for calm abiding, and for resting in God's love. Perhaps, we have grown to see we need to stop doing things that we are being guided away from. Perhaps, we are called to something new and finding new ways to make our hearts sing with love. Perhaps quiet restfulness, perhaps stopping our busyness, perhaps initiating something new appeals to us. I invite you to experience yourself at St. Peter's and to follow your heart.

Generosity, kindness, tolerance, patience, and I believe, a hunger for justice are all strengths. As with any strength, you get stronger when you exercise it.

Looking deeper each day, we can see new opportunities to exercise our strengths, opportunities for kindness, generosity, and the rest...exercise we do because we are Christians, and because it makes sense in a world deformed by hate and indifference.

In the end, the only thing that will matter will be how well we loved. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is to pay attention to the person we encounter, more so, to be attentive to the ones we love (and often take for granted). To be present in the moment, heart and soul, attentive to the sounds of life in the midst of anxiety, laughter, sorrow, and wonder. Heaven opens where we are and invites us in as we are. The moral of the story is that grace is everywhere and love abounds, but it must be received and celebrated. This is the sacrament of everyday life.

**Ilia Delio**

*The Hours of the Universe: Reflections on God, Science, and the Human Journey*

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Lent is a time to be somber and quiet and humble. But beyond that, Lent is about passion and fire and love and seeing things as they really truly are and rejoicing in God's love. Lenten austerity and simplicity is the doorway to receiving and celebrating Gods grace right now and right here.

This Lent, one bit of dust suggesting something to another bit of dust, I invite you to experience our church and become more aware. Then act with love, guided by your wisdom.