

(Today/Tonight), we begin our journey into Lent, stepping into a season that calls us to reflection, repentance, and renewal. The ashes we will receive remind us of our mortality:

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

These words can sound stark, but they are not spoken to diminish us. Rather, they are words of truth wrapped in grace—words that remind us of who we are before God and who God is for us.

Lent echoes the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness, a place of struggle but also a place of encounter. The wilderness is not comfortable. It strips away distractions, leaving us with nothing but our raw, unfiltered selves before God. Yet, throughout Scripture, the wilderness is where transformation happens.

The Israelites wandered in the desert and learned dependence on God.

Elijah, fleeing for his life, heard God's still small voice in the wilderness.

Jesus, too, was tested but emerged ready to proclaim the kingdom of God.

The wilderness is not a place of abandonment but a place where grace meets us in our need.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, speaks of the challenges and hardships of faithfulness:

"as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (2 Cor 6:10).

These words hold together the tension of human frailty and divine grace.

We are dust—not in the sense that we are insignificant, but in the sense that we are part of

the great and beautiful creation of God, shaped by divine hands.

Our dustiness reminds us that we are not self-sufficient, that we rely on God for life and breath and hope.

And though we are dust, we are loved—held within the grace of the One who shaped us and breathes life into us still.

This year, as we journey through Lent, in our lent groups we are reflecting on poverty. We know of material poverty, the lack of resources that leaves people hungry and cold. But there is also a poverty of the spirit, a hunger that no meal can satisfy.

Our world is full of distractions that can leave us spiritually malnourished, longing for something more.

Lent is an invitation to renewal. Not a season of self-punishment, but a season of grace—a time to open ourselves to God's work within us, to rediscover the depths of divine love, to let go of what burdens us and embrace what brings life.

It is us learning afresh how to walk with the mystery of life that we long for.

I offer a story, I don't know if it is true or not, I heard it in a sermon a few years ago.

A minister once visited an elderly woman in a care home. She had lived a long and difficult life, carrying regrets and griefs that weighed heavily on her heart. She looked up at the minister and said, "I feel like there's nothing left of me. I'm just an old woman, tired and worn out."

The minister took her hand and said,

"You are not forgotten. You are not worthless. You are still beloved dust—held by the One who made you, the One who never lets you go."

The lady smiled through her tears. "Beloved dust," she whispered. "That's a nice thought."

Beloved dust – what a beautiful phrase to describe who we are and how God sees us.

We are dust, but beloved dust.

We are imperfect, yet held in perfect love.

We are broken, yet God is always making us new.

So, as we step into this season of Lent, let us do so not with fear, but with openness. Let us enter the wilderness, trusting that God is already there. Let us acknowledge our dustiness, knowing that grace meets us in our need. Let us

seek renewal, trusting that God is always at work, shaping, healing, and making all things new.

This is our journey. We walk it together; we walk it with God.

And you are invited to walk it with us.

Amen.