

**Dust in the Wind**  
*February 21, 2007*  
(Ash Wednesday - Year C)  
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10  
*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

It seems that, lately, I have been surrounded by occasions of death.

Two Thursdays ago, on February 8th, I buried Gladys Hunt. Gladys Hunt had been a faithful member of this congregation for many, many years.

Gladys was 91 when she died.

And, the faithful gathered around her graveside, in a cold and raw February wind.

As I spread dirt on her casket, I said these words from the Burial service in The Book of Common Prayer:

“In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our sister Gladys, and we commit her body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

Then, last Thursday, the baby granddaughter of Cathy and Bob Ratcliff died.

Cathy and Bob are faithful members at the 7:30 service.

And, their little granddaughter, Kinley Ticknor, died last Thursday from bacterial meningitis, when she was only 1 month old.

I went down to Houston to participate in the burial service, along with 2 other priests.

The grief and the incredible love for this remarkable little girl was overwhelming.

As dirt was spread onto the little casket, the same words from the Burial service in The Book of Common Prayer were said:

“In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our sister Kinley, and we commit her body to the ground, earth to earth,

ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

I have not been a priest very long, but I have been a priest just long enough to know that death comes in waves.

Last Monday night, two long-time members of our congregation, Marjorie Seawright and Sarah Appell, both died, within hours of each other.

And, as I will bury Marjorie on Thursday and Sarah on Friday, I will say the same words:

In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our sister Marjorie, our sister Sarah, and we commit her body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

In a few minutes, I will invite all of you to the observance of a holy Lent.

Then, I will put ashes onto your forehead, in the sign of the cross, and I will say to each of you:

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

As you return back to your seats and as you go up for Communion later, you will notice that each one of us will have these ashes on our forehead.

Each one of us will wear ashes today because each one of us will one day have the same words said at our death:

“Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

Yet, Ash Wednesday is not all about death and dust and ashes, although death and dust and ashes are an integral part of our faith.

Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth saying:

“We are treated as...dying, and see - we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”

Ash Wednesday is about facing the fact that all of us are dying, that we

will all go down to the dust.

Ash Wednesday is about facing the fact we are sorrowful, we are poor, we have nothing.

Yet, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, in the midst of death and mortality, the truth is that, even though we are dying, we are also alive, we are rejoicing, for we have nothing, and yet we possess everything.

All of us will go down to the dust.

All of us are born out of dust and to dust we shall return.

Yet, it is what we do with our lives between our birth and our death that makes a difference.

It is what we do with our lives between our birth and our death that makes a difference in the lives of other people.

Lent is a time for us to face up to our own mortality and to begin again.

Traditionally, people have given things up for Lent.

But, I would hope that we would expand our definition of Lent as not just a 40-day period of self-denial, but also a time of new beginnings, a time to make a difference in the lives of other people.

During Lent at St. Alban's, we will hear various speakers at our Lenten Programs on Tuesday nights, speakers who will tell us about the needs in our community.

Our speakers will talk about various ways in which *we* can make a difference in the lives of someone else in Waco.

Yet, you don't have wait for new ministry at St. Alban's in order to make a difference in someone else's life.

Start this Lent by having a new attitude about your co-workers.

Start this Lent by turning over a new leaf in your marriage.

Start this Lent by doing something kind for a stranger.

For, we are only dying clumps of dust and ashes.

But, it is a life of service to others, in Jesus Christ, that breathes life into our ashes and stokes the fire of an abundant life, a life enflamed

with love.

So, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through  
Jesus Christ, remember that you are dust and to dust you shall  
return.

In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, remember that  
we are alive, we are rejoicing, we are loving each other..

Because, without love, all we are is dust in the wind.

AMEN.

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