

Ash Wednesday., St. Andrew, Feb 14, 2024,

Pastor Susan Kintner

Brothers, Sisters, and non-binary siblings, I confess to you tonight that the first Ash Wednesday after I began working with the Bishop, I came to this service hopeful that I would be with a familiar community, in a beautiful sanctuary, receive communion and begin Lent. I was shocked and amazed when the worship leaders that year, decided to not have communion. So I did what any emotionally intelligent, gracious and grounded, mature disciple would do— I went home and wrote an email full of righteous indignation.

I put on the whole armor of God from Ephesians 6:

The belt of truth, the breastplate, of righteousness, The shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and sword of the Word! I told them their decision was wrong and backed it up with theological, historical and liturgical facts. I hit the Send button.

There was no response for 2 weeks. The silence was deafening. When Christine Core did respond, it was a caring response—the phone call began with, “Susan, are you ok?”

With time, reflection and prayer, I realized that in the transition to this new call, I was grieving no longer being a parish pastor, and overwhelmed with the new work, where folks actually weren't all that sure they wanted someone from the Bishop's office visiting.

As I pondered my hurt, my wise spiritual director asked what I missed the most? What was the hurt underneath the anger? I missed the precious silence of communion, when I could pray and sense God's presence. I was living through a huge transition. I was searching for an anchor, that I expected in Communion.

That Ash Wednesday service was a long time ago now. When Pastor Newman texted on Monday morning with the news of her positive Covid test, I had to giggle a little at the Spirit's sense of humor.

What a gift to be with you today as we begin Lent.

So I have to ask, Are you OK? What are you hoping for today? What brings you here? What are you grieving? Are you going through any transitions?

This is one of my absolute favorite liturgies of the entire year— because we come together as a community, we acknowledge to one another that we will all die, and we gather in hope at the table, to receive again forgiveness, hope, dignity and God’s resurrection love. We proclaim tonight that God’s love is stronger than death.

One of the unique contributions of the church, is that we are able to openly speak about death. We even pray about it. In the Compline liturgy, the last prayers of the day, the night-night prayers of the church, we pray:

Almighty God, grant us a quiet night and peace at the last. And  
Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

By acknowledging that we will die, we are forced to confront how we spend our lives, aren’t we? How then shall we live?

We need Lent every year, to review what our priorities are— Lent is the time of year, that we review our relationship with one another, and with God, to see what changes we are being called to make. Discipleship is rarely a straight path— it goes all over the place.

I understood my parish ministry as preparing people for a good death, Whenever that was going to happen. How do we live a meaningful, truthful, caring, life of discipleship? What do we disciples need to learn now?

The classic Lenten disciplines are Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving. That is one reason we do the food drive in Lent. So, dear disciples, in these coming weeks, I encourage you to Pray, and to Serve, and to care for those in need. This year, St. Andrew will be paying particular attention to Lament—the faithful practice of sharing with God, our broken hearts.

In the ACS book there is actually a section on Lament, and a form, a template for writing a new ones, as we need them.

Laments are when we cry How Long O Lord—Crying out for justice, Yearning for what is right, longing for God’s peace.

May this Ash Wednesday and this Lent be a gift to us all—  
that we will honestly see our griefs,  
that we will remember again our baptismal promises— that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the Cross of Christ forever- and that out of that love, we will gain insight and strength, courage and hope to seek and work for Peace, for justice, for healing, and the promise of a future as we confront war, exploration, mass immigration, and political polarization.

May we be people who can look hard hard things in the eye, and work to be God's hands in this world. May we be people of prayer.

Amen.