

Ash Wednesday Message
February 14, 2018
“To Be Thrown, Burned, Spun, Brushed, & Cleansed”
North East United Methodist Church
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Have you not only trusted Christ for salvation, but also allowed Christ to begin the process of transformation, the process of change, the process as it says in **2 Corinthians 3:18** that changes you *“into his likeness from one degree of glory to another?”*

If you have given your life to Jesus...Jesus has given himself to you and has made your heart His home. As Paul says in **Galatians 2:20**, *“Christ lives in me.”* Are we tapping into Christ? Are we allowing Christ to transform us as it says in **Colossians 3:10**, *“You have begun to live a new life, in which you are being made new and are becoming like the One who made you. This new life brings you the true knowledge of God.”*

When we not only allow Christ to enter our hearts but transform them...Christ begins to root out the sin that is in our lives...as someone said, *“The closer we draw near to the light of Christ, the more our sins are lit up.”* When we tap into the power, Christ leads us to be more and more like Jesus Christ – *“into his likeness from one degree of glory to another.”*

As Max Lucado writes, *“God loves you just the way you are but He refuses to leave you that way...He wants you to be just like Jesus.”*

Lent is a time when we allow God’s grace to root out the sin in our lives; we focus our thoughts more on God, inviting God to bring our lives more in line with His principles and the life of His Son.

Lent is a season of soul-searching and repentance. It is a season for reflection and taking stock. Lent originated in the very earliest days of the Church as a preparatory time for Easter, when the faithful rededicated themselves and

when converts were instructed in the faith and prepared for baptism. By observing the forty days of Lent, the individual Christian imitates Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness for forty days, emptying ourselves of the things of the world which tempt us and instead, focusing our thoughts on the word of God which gives us strength.

Often we don't look forward to the transformation God wants to make on our lives? We stand back, not allowing God to come in and root around inside, showing us what we need to empty ourselves of in order to make more room for Him. We avoid allowing God to cause us to dig too deep because much of the time it hurts. God's grace can be described at times like a wire brush being scraped across our being, wiping away the grime and dirt that has collected there, and making us more into the likeness of God's son, Jesus Christ.

Sometimes...many times it hurts. God asks us to spit out the dirt in our lives...holds us and cleanses us of the filth, immorality, dishonesty, prejudice, bitterness, greed, & pride. Many times we do not enjoy the cleansing. Sometimes we even opt for the dirt.

Ash Wednesday is a day of repentance and it marks the beginning of Lent. Ashes were used in ancient times, according to the Bible, to express mourning. Dusting oneself with ashes was the penitent's way of expressing sorrow for sins and faults. An ancient example of one expressing one's penitence is found in **Job 42**. Job says to God: *"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."*

Ash Wednesday is the day that we express our remorse and sorrow for the many ways we have disobeyed God, the many ways we have hurt others, the many ways we have ignored our Savior. It is a time to confess these sins and to invite God into our hearts to begin to clean once more...To say, "Lord, I invite you in...go ahead and do your work...root out those areas of my life I need to change...those

things I need to empty myself of to make more room for you...those habits I need to start that I might be closer to you...those attitudes that must be destroyed so I can be more like your son, Jesus Christ.”

This is a time to fight with our pride, our gossip, our hatred of others, our prejudices, our unwillingness to listen to someone who differs from us...it is a time to wrestle with how we forgive, what is on our “history” when it comes to surfing the internet, how we treat our wives and if we are fulfilling our roles as Godly men, how much time we are spending in prayer and the Bible. This is a season where we are to wrestle with the serious issues in our lives that are holding us back from growing into the likeness of Jesus Christ...we are to wrestle with God like Jacob wrestled on the shore of the Jabbok river, all night until we are completely spent...and at the end of the Lenten season, when we walk in on Easter Sunday, that which we have given up will be gone for good and we will be new creations, having taken one step closer to our goal of becoming just like Jesus.

Jeremiah 18 (NIV) - *This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: “Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message.” So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the word of the LORD came to me. He said, “Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand...”*

God takes His prophet Jeremiah down to the potter’s house and shows him the potter spinning the clay and molding it into a vessel. At times the potter has to smash the clay and begin anew or work it over to make it smoother...Like the potter with his clay, God molds us...molds us and fashions us...but only if we allow Him can we truly get to the imperfections deep within...God won’t force Himself deep inside...We have to go with Him...allowing Him to help us root out

everything that is contrary to the One who created us. There is a great story about a teacup that perfectly illustrates this...

Spotting an exceptional cup, a couple asked, "May we see that? We've never seen a cup quite so beautiful."

As the lady handed it to them, the tea cup spoke. "You don't understand," it said, "I have not always been a tea cup. There was a time when I was just a lump of red clay. My master took me and rolled me pounded and patted me over and over and I yelled out, 'Don't do that. I don't like it! Let me alone,' but he only smiled, and gently said, 'Not yet!'

"Then, WHAM! I was placed on a spinning wheel and suddenly I was spun around and around and around. 'Stop it! I'm getting so dizzy! I'm going to be sick!', I screamed. But the master only nodded and said, quietly, 'Not yet.'

"He spun me and poked and prodded and bent me out of shape to suit himself and then....then he put me in the oven. I never felt such heat. I yelled and knocked and pounded at the door. 'Help! Get me out of here!' I could see him through the opening and I could read his lips as he shook his head from side to side, 'Not yet.'

"When I thought I couldn't bear it another minute, the door opened. He carefully took me out and put me on the shelf, and I began to cool. 'Oh, that felt so good! Ah, this is much better,' I thought. But, after I cooled he picked me up and he brushed and painted me all over. The fumes were horrible. I thought I would gag. 'Oh, please; stop it, stop it!!' I cried. He only shook his head and said. 'Not yet!'

"Then suddenly he put me back in to the oven. Only it was not like the first one. This was twice as hot and I just knew I would suffocate. I begged. I pleaded. I screamed. I cried. I was convinced I would never make it. I was ready to give up.

"Just then the door opened and he took me out and again placed me on the shelf, where I cooled and waited and waited, wondering, What's he going to do to me next? An hour later he handed me a mirror and said 'Look at yourself.' And I did. "I said, 'That's not me; that couldn't be me. It's beautiful. I'm beautiful!'

"Quietly he spoke: 'I want you to remember, then,' he said, 'I know it hurt to be rolled and pounded and patted, but had I just left you alone, you'd have dried up. I know it made you dizzy to spin around on the wheel, but if I had stopped, you would have crumbled. I know it hurt and it was hot

and disagreeable in the oven, but if I hadn't put you there, you would have cracked. I know the fumes were bad when I brushed and painted you all over, but if I hadn't done that, you never would have hardened. You would not have had any color in your life. If I hadn't put you back in that second oven, you wouldn't have survived for long because the hardness would not have held. Now you are a finished product. Now you are what I had in mind when I first began with you."

Lent is a time when we allow God to throw us in the fire, spin us on the wheel, deal with our cracks and blemishes, brush us and cleanse us...Lent is a time to imagine what it means to be just like Jesus...to look long and hard into the heart of Christ...considering his compassion, reflecting upon his intimacy with the Father, admiring his focus, and pondering his endurance. What was His attitude? How did he forgive? When did he pray? What made him so pleasant? How did He treat others? We fix our eyes on Jesus, and through Him we look long and hard into our own hearts with His eyes. We begin to see what we can become with God's help and we begin to see how far away we are from that goal. We lean on God for help and strength, asking Him to change us...to mold us...As Paul writes in **Philippians 1:6**, we set our sight on Christ, *"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*

During this season of Lent, God is willing to further change us into the likeness of the Savior. Shall we accept His offer?