

Lectionary A March 5, 2017 1st Sunday in Lent
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana
Pastor Roberta Meyer

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Psalm 32

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

Muddy Mess

Wednesday, I put my finger in the ash pot and smeared black crosses on worshippers' foreheads and said, "*Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.*" That is a messy job. I wore my old robe so I wouldn't get it on my good one. It took some scrubbing to get the black oily stuff out from under my fingernails. Yet, it is a holy job, remembering and reminding others who we are.

This week I said, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, three times at funerals of loved ones who have finished their earthly journey. "*Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return*" was very real for me this week.

Today, the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Lent begins with a profound message. Look at the picture on the front of our bulletin. That wilderness was a dusty place, a desert wilderness. Jesus was there for forty days and forty nights. It says he fasted. He was famished, more than hungry. More than empty. He was practically starving to death. "*Remember you are dust, to dust you shall return.*" That doesn't apply to Jesus, does it? Well, according to what his tempter sneered, it doesn't have to. "*If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.*" And up on the highest point of the temple, "*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down... He will command his angels concerning you...so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.*"

What's really happening in this story about Jesus in the dusty wilderness being "tempted" by the devil? Jesus is God. Was there really anything that the devil could offer that would tempt Jesus? As I listen to this story, I can picture God chuckling at the devil's attempts. The devil was offering God what was already God's! "Worship you and you will give me "*all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor*" I was there when they were created, in fact, I created them! "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*"² *He was in the beginning with God.*"³ *All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.*"

In Luther's Small Catechism, the section about the Apostle's Creed, Luther explains, "*I believe that Jesus Christ is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary...*" Jesus is fully God and fully human. Being true man means dust. His earthly body was made of dust. He felt the pangs of hunger. Humans can all be tempted. Our defense against

temptation is knowing how to resist it. That is what is going on here—Jesus, true man, equipping us.

We talked about this scripture at the meeting we had Tuesday evening with the six ELCA Lutheran Churches in Evansville. As our devotion, we read this and discussions what stood out to us. One person noted that what Jesus was doing here, was bringing us back to focus on what was important. Each time he was tempted he skirted the stuff Satan was throwing out at him and focused on what is important, the Word of God.

And we aren't talking about picking out pieces of the Bible to fit your point of view on a given subject, like so many try to do. There is a quote accredited to Martin Luther. "*The Bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid.*" So when we look at God's word, we consider it as a whole with Jesus in the middle. Love for God and others is the message Jesus brings.

That is where Jesus continually points back to when Satan tries to distract him. He goes right back to the first commandment. "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*" When you think about it, isn't that what temptation is? Choosing someone or something else as god, instead of God? That is the essence of sin.

So, what's this all have to do with ashes and dust? Jesus became dust so we could become God's children, more than dust. Last week, I walked with three families as they laid their loved ones to rest. Their bodies were returned to the dust they came from. But Ginny, Keith, and Helen were more than the dust we returned to the ground. In their Baptism, they inherited the Kingdom of God.

That is another ritual, that as an ordained servant of God, I am honored to do, baptism. It's a little messy, too. I remember the first time I did a baptism. It kind of took my breath away. No one ever told me what to expect. When I dip my hand into the water and bring it up to pour onto the head of the person I am baptizing, a backwash of water goes down my sleeve. I carry the waters of baptism with me the rest of the service. As the one I baptize is washed clean and made new, through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, I feel that soaking=wet cleansing, too. Maybe, sometimes even more than they do. It is a holy job. Remembering and reminding others who we are.

That is where we are today on this first Sunday in Lent. Smearred with the reality that we are dust and washed with the reality that we are children of God, marked with the cross of Christ forever. Huh, we could say with all this dust and water, we are a muddy mess. And being muddy is just the way God wants us. Remember the part in the Bible about us being clay and God molding us and shaping us?

This is the process that will continue until, like Ginny, Keith, and Helen, our dust is returned and we are given new bodies that aren't dust. Until then, let's continue down the path, holding tight to Jesus' hand. There is a song I want to share with you. It is all about this God making beautiful things—out of dust. It is my Lenten song this year.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJ4yNYY1hHM>

“Beautiful Things”

By Michael Gungor

All this pain
I wonder if I'll ever find my way
I wonder if my life could really change at all
All this earth
Could all that is lost ever be found
Could a garden come up from this ground at all

You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of the dust
You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of us

All around
Hope is springing up from this old ground
Out of chaos life is being found in You

You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of the dust
You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of us

You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of the dust
You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of us

You make me new, You are making me new
You make me new, You are making me new

You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of the dust
You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of us

