



Ravensworth

BAPTIST CHURCH

March 2, 2022 | Ash Wednesday, Year W

Joel 2:1, 12-22

In the Garden

Rev. Dr. Leah Grundset Davis, preaching

During the season of Lent, we move from excavating to cultivating our roots in the garden. God's work in us and all of creation is a gift. Let this Lent be a season to tend, to prune, to create roots that find a home in the love of God. Our Sunday readings all feature gardens and the life that teems forth even during the most uncertain seasons.

You're invited to slow down and notice new life about to spring forth. From the buds on branches to the bulbs breaking ground, the lengthening of days calls us inward as a season of growth.

This evening, we choose to be present to mark ourselves with the sign of the cross on our foreheads or hands with the ashes of the day. The ancient tradition is a marking--to remember who we are--we are dust, and to dust we shall return. But in the words of Jan Richardson, "did you not know what the Holy One can do with dust?"

This is a contemplative invitation, one to the inner self, even as we remain focused on loving neighbor. Perhaps with the inward journey, we are even more attuned to those who surround us.

The prophet Joel speaks to a people in a different place and time, but ones who also sought or needed to seek repentance. Returning our hearts to God for this season doesn't mean they weren't there before, but it's a time to break with the pace, make a turn, and create an intention.

Joel reminds us, whispers to us, God is gracious and loves as a mother, slow to anger, and abounds in faithful love. In this type of love, even the wilderness is a garden—the tree lifts up its fruit, the fig tree and the vine give their riches.

This is the type of Lent we seek. And we begin today, picking up the dust of the earth from the garden of life from which was came, and marking ourselves with the reminder of God's love.

Because as Jan Richardson says,
All those days
you felt like dust, like dirt,
as if all you had to do was turn your face
toward the wind
and be scattered
to the four corners
or swept away
by the smallest breath
as insubstantial—
did you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?

This is the day

we freely say
we are scorched.
This is the hour
we are marked
by what has made it
through the burning.
This is the moment
we ask for the blessing
that lives within
the ancient ashes,
that makes its home
inside the soil of
this sacred earth.

So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.
Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less
than we are
but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,
within the dirt,
within the stuff
of which the world
is made

and the stars that blaze in our bones and the galaxies that spiral inside the
smudge
we bear.^[1]
May it be so. Amen.

^[1] Jan Richardson, [*Blessing the Dust*](#) The Painted Prayerbook, 2013.