

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lent begins with truth, a hard truth:  
ashes remind us that we are finite, vulnerable, and broken.  
They mark our foreheads with the honesty of our condition:  
we are creatures of dust.  
It also begins with an invitation that is not sentimental.  
Jesus does not offer an escape route from the truth of our mortality  
or even from suffering, nor does he romanticize pain.  
He calls us instead into a way of life:  
to follow him,  
to take up the cross daily,  
and to walk the road where truth and love  
collide with the powers of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Tonight we heard the readings from Joel and Psalm 51.  
Probably no surprise that those were read tonight.  
Now is the time to for repentance and self-examination.  
Appropriate as we are reminded tonight that, indeed,  
one day we will stand before God.

And then we heard not from Matthew, but from Luke.  
This parable invites us to consider a communal feast.  
Lent is not only about our inner reflections, repentance and spirituality.  
Lent is also about our communal experiences of the journey.

In this parable, the host sends invitations to people like him.  
They share his social standing.  
They're not in need of food and drink and celebration.  
They've got plenty of their own.  
And, he's sure they'll abide by the norms of society and  
return the invitation down the road.

When the time came, the guests chose their mundane tasks  
over the lavish feast the host had prepared.

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<sup>1</sup> Viera, Javier. Rooted in the Cross. [CUARESMA 2026](#)

And, it's as if he has a spiritual awakening by this rebuffing.  
He is jolted from the norms of social graces and social behavior.  
He's been following the norms of societal behavior.  
Now though, he makes an extraordinary turn.

After his turning, all are invited.  
The host sends the invitation not to  
the highest but to the lowest,  
not to the elite but to the forgotten,  
not to the very wealthy but to those who have nothing,  
not to the healthiest but to the least healthy.  
And then he sends the servant out again.  
And even as guests begin to enter,  
there is still more room for more to join.  
Still more abundance to be shared.

The ordinary host became extraordinary in his invitation.  
This lent we are invited to become extraordinary people  
who emulate God's transcendent love  
by inviting not just those who have,  
but also those who need.  
Let us strive to restore the socially broken ones  
and make them physically welcome in areas of our lives, our church,  
city and society that have been closed off to them.

This season of Lent we are grounding ourselves,  
regrounding ourselves in the good news of Jesus' teaching.  
Each Sunday we'll hear again about what was central to Jesus' life and ministry:  
radical welcome, love for neighbor, care for the vulnerable,  
nourishment for the hungry,  
nonviolence in the face of injustice.

At the heart of Jesus' teachings, we find  
liberation, love, mercy, and grace –  
all of which are meant to be very good news for us all.

Following Jesus leads to a richer, more expansive life,

but it's not necessarily comfortable.

Seeking to reflect Jesus actions and teaching to the world  
can ground us in who God created us to be.

Can we be "good news" people in a world often burdened by bad news?

Dust and ash is a call not only to humility but to  
being regrounded in the very earthiness of life.

Ash Wednesday is a day of regrounding as much as it is of humility.

I hope you will carry the two slips of paper with you this Lent.

The world was created for each of us.

We are only dust and ash.

It's time to reground ourselves in  
the things that are important to God.

As the prophet Joel instructs, pour out your hearts to God.

Let this season be a gift for contemplation.

May this season be one of confession and change.

May our journey to the cross take us from  
desolation dust and ash to new creations  
by the power and love of God our creator.

Amen.