

Ash Wednesday  
Joel 2: 1-2, 12-17  
February 25, 2009

Trinity Episcopal Church  
Sonoma, CA

Rend Your Hearts:  
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

I love Ash Wednesday. It is one of my favorite days in the church year. The somber look of the church—crosses veiled in purple, the barren altar, the small bowl of ashes on the credence table.

The hush of it all—words spoken softly, people kneeling in silent prayer, and the quiet refrain, “You are dust and to dust you shall return.”

Together we kneel in silence. Together we say the words of Psalm 51. Together we pray the Great Litany.

Together we bear the ashen mark of the cross.

“You are dust and to dust you shall return.” These words point to the book of Genesis and the beginnings of our shared story. Adam made out of clay. Adam made in the image of God.

This is a day when we are reminded that we are all made of the same stuff. That we all are made in the image of God. And this is a day that reminds us that we all fall short of that mark.

But the point of the day is not that we fall short of the mark—that’s part of being human. The point of the day is to call us to repent and return to the Lord. The point of the day is to remind us that the God who made us in his image calls us to return to his heart.

Listen to the words of the prophet Joel,  
Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
rend your hearts and not your clothing.

“Rend your hearts.” That can only happen when we look squarely at the moments we have forgotten in whose image we are made.

In a few minutes we will pray together the litany of penitence. As you pray those words of penitence, rend your heart. For in rending our hardened hearts, we make space for God to enter in.

The prophet Joel urges us,  
Return to the Lord your God,  
for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...

We are dust. Let us together repent and return to the one who has made us in his image.

