

Let us pray... Eternal God, gather your Spirit in this place, and open our hearts to love.... Guide our journey together, with you at the center. Amen.

When my sister and I were little, we had a fun routine.

After getting home from school we would always find our dad in the kitchen...

To give you a visual of my parents' house, the kitchen opened to a long hallway that led to the bedrooms...

So, upon arriving home from school, my sister and I would go to the far end of the hallway...

Where we would take turns running down the hallway, into the kitchen and then jump into our dads' arms... And we boldly termed this act, the run and jump.

But the best thing about our run and jump, is that my dad appeared to be oblivious to what we were doing, and he never looked in the direction we were coming from...

Despite all of the noise we must have made running down the hall, we always thought we were catching him off guard...

And to our amazement, every time, as we were leaping through the air our dad would turn around and catch us.

A memory frozen in time... Based off a moment when my dad chose to turn around and turn towards love.

And turning towards love is easier to do in those kind of moments... The moments when you're happy, when you are with the people you love.

And sometimes it is not so easy... Leaving us with a choice... Do you to turn and choose love or do you to turn away from it?

As Rachel Marie Martin plainly states. "Today you have a choice. You can choose between anger and love... Division and unity... Frustration and hope... Selfishness and giving... Turning away and showing up... Choose kindness. The choice is simple. It's hard to regret being kind."

And while the choice may be simple, it is sometimes hard to do...

Which means that choosing kindness is more than a choice... It involves a different way of living, and is rooted in God's love.

And this is what Jesus is getting at today when he said... "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Because Jesus knows that our hearts are the source of our motivation.

And so, he is calling us to reflect and think.

To think about why we do what we do, and how we can invite God in all that we do...

Because God is the source of life, and the salvation from death.

Which is why we are here tonight... Ash Wednesday is a reminder of death... That we are but dust and to dust we shall return.

Ash Wednesday quite literally paints a picture on our foreheads... A reminder of life's harsh reality... That at some point in time, all earthly things will wither into irrelevance, and be left to the mercy of God...

Because death is the moment, we rely entirely on God...

And when we compare this harsh reality, our reliance on God in death, to our reliance on God in life, we can feel the gravity of what Jesus is saying...

Jesus wants us to rely on God while we live our lives, when we still have choices to make... Because our choices impact others...

And the ashes you will receive tonight are also a reminder of that. Ashes are not just a symbol of death; they are also a symbol of life. Of life's journey from beginning to end...

Ashes given in the sign of the cross, the same cross you received at your baptism...

When you were claimed as a child of God, and called to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, working for justice and peace... Our baptismal calling sounds a lot like turning toward love...

Ash Wednesday reminds us of our baptismal calling, and the important work that needs to be done.

By turning toward God, and by turning toward love... Like that of a child, rushing to feel love and to be loved, so that we can share love.

Sharing love with your neighbors, even those who might think differently than you....

And it may not be easy to share that love with arms wide open arms at first. But God is there to guide the way.

A way that is paved with ash and dust, a reminder of how fleeting life is...

A sign of urgency, because now is the time to live into our baptismal calling...

And to honor that this Lent, let's do just that... Let's run and jump into God's love... Amen.