



First Congregational Church of Ashfield ❖ United Church of Christ
Creating Community, Welcoming All

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Rev. David Jones, Minister

Ash Wednesday Service, February 22, 2023

Rev. Jenna Smith

Welcome

A Prayer for Ash Wednesday

We forget sometimes that ashes come from fire,
That this soft black powder was once a firm green frond,
Bright and vibrant before it became dry and brittle,
Stiff and fibrous before a flame transformed it into dust.
Every living thing submits to change.
Let's not fear it.

From seed to plant, palm to ash,
This bit of the earth smudged on our foreheads today
Was carried lovingly in the hands of the Creator.
What fires will we step into this Lent?
What new forms will our souls take
When we encounter the holy blaze of the Living God?
We are—it is true—ash to ash and dust to dust,
But whether in youth or in old age, in life or in death,
Let us be assured,
We are held, and we are God's.
Amen.

Cameron Bellm

Lighting of the candle

Opening reflection:

“Isn't the story of compost just the story of God? Turning fear to courage, sorrow to joy, turning death to life...A robust theology of compost reminds us that death and the things of death such as the way we hurt each other, this is never the end of the story. We are in the process of becoming. God has written redemption into the soy of creation itself. God has empowered us to turn what is ugly and festering and dying into what is lovely and life-giving and beautiful.

The theology of the compost pile compels us to accept that death is a part of our lives. Death is more of a part of our reality than I want it to be, if I am honest about it. We have seen that too much over recent months. The hope I draw from the compost pile is that God is always pointing us to new life. God is always pointing us to resurrection and God is always pointing us to the Great Feast. Not just metaphorically, but really and truly.”
Jeff Chu, writer, gardener and reverend

Moment of quiet reflection

Reflection from Jenna Smith

Imposition of the ashes : *“Remember you came from the earth, and to the earth you will return.”*

If you are willing and able, you are invited to partner up with someone from the circle and repeat these words to each other as you draw the sign of the cross on their forehead or palm with the ashes. Jenna is also available to do this for anyone who so desires.

Final Blessing

Blessing the Dust For Ash Wednesday

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.

—Jan Richardson