

## **Sermon Transcript**

**The Rev. Laura Palmer**

**March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025 - Ash Wednesday**

### **A Courage Born of Love**

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer, Amen.

Sooner or later, we all will confront our own mortality. The familiar words on this day, Ash Wednesday, "From dust ye come and from dust ye shall return," are a foretaste of that reality. It comes to us in so many ways—a terrible diagnosis, a near miss collision, an emergency landing, or for me, in the periodontist's office two weeks ago.

Yes, the periodontist. But it wasn't the dentist-- it was the state-of-the art technology – 3D imagery—that assessed what needed to be done. When I glanced at the computer which captured it, I saw my skull. Skin, hair, face, all gone. Just the skull, my skull. It was stark, dramatic, unsettling. I was a bit shaken-- in a dental office-- not an exhibit of skulls in a genocide museum.

But now I think it was perhaps just what I needed to enter into this season of Lent. It is hard to confront death and even harder to confront our own. But it has sharpened my focus and propelled me to turn inwards and acknowledge the truth that yes, from dust we come and yes, to dust we shall return. How do I live with that truth and where might it lead me?

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of our 40-day journey with Jesus to Jerusalem and the cross. There is no turning back. We walk in faith, with hope, and alongside Jesus, who stood up to an evil empire without an army or weapons, only a courage born of love. Who he was and what he stood for was non-negotiable.

There is so much in our world that I want to turn away from. But my fear of what is to come, my dread at the millions who will die preventable deaths because of the end of humanitarian aid programs, the millions of our siblings in Christ in this country who have lost jobs and are afraid that they will be ripped away from their families and their lives and put on a plane to somewhere else. Whatever light I carry is flickering.

Turning inward may be the exact place to start. My fear helps no one. My helplessness leads nowhere. But I can draw closer to Jesus, and let him lead me, let his light point the way. Let his strength merge with mine. Let his love ignite my courage. If there ever was a time to do it, it's now.

Don't let anyone ever tell you can't have faith and fear. I have plenty of both. The choice is for me to choose which one I will nurture, which one I will feed.

This Ash Wednesday, I'm humbled by the courage of the Ukrainians to persist in fighting for their democracy. How can I do any less for my own? We are now being called to stand together in this world as we have never done before – at least in my lifetime. Isaiah calls us to arise, and to let our light shine. To be repairers of the breach.

But how much am I willing to sacrifice for my faith, my country, how do I live out the values I was ordained to uphold? To live for something larger and greater than myself?

What do these 40 days have to teach me, you, us? We are pilgrims, all of us, wandering in the wilderness. But we are there together. That for me is a tremendous source of strength. Together we face the biting reality that there are no shortcuts, no end runs around the bitter cup. That cup that Jesus asked God to take away from him the night before he dies before saying, "But if not my will, thy will."

The wilderness may be something essential and not something to dread when we open ourselves to it fully. Reflects author Debie Thomas:

Maybe we, like Jesus, need long stints in the wilderness to learn  
what it means to be God's precious children. Because the unnerving  
fact is this: we can be beloved and uncomfortable at the same time. We  
can be beloved and unsafe at the same time. In the wilderness, the love  
that survives is flinty, not soft. Salvific, not sentimental. Learning to trust it  
takes time...if the cross teaches us anything, it teaches us that God's  
precious children bleed, still ache, still die. We are loved in our  
vulnerability. Not out of it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas, Debie, "Journey with Jesus," 2020

Our vulnerability, the shaky ground I so often want to flee, may actually be exactly where I belong, a source of strength if I enter fully into it. Two months ago we rejoiced at the birth of a tiny, vulnerable baby born in the manger to Mary—a vulnerable teenager-- whose “Yes” to God came from a courage born of love—and it changed the world.

You and I have that same courage. Maybe it has been hidden, ignored, discounted. Maybe you can’t imagine that in this life you already have what you need, as God’s beloved. Dive deep inside yourself and tap into your courage born of love. And then continue to do the work we are called to do—to care for the sick, feed the hungry, serve the poor.

There is no more sacred time than Lent to do this holy work. If you are truly able to enter the silence of this time and traverse its barren wilderness you may be astounded to find that God is right there waiting for you, his beloved child. We have been baptized into a courage born of love in Jesus’ name. It changes everything; always has and always will when and if we let it.

Wise words from Bishop Guitierrez who reminds us: “If you have kept Jesus at a distance, step forward. If you have been indifferent, take a risk. If following Jesus seems difficult, and it will be, do not be afraid. Your relationship with Jesus is not a restriction, it is a liberation.”

And as we continue to liberate ourselves, we’ll begin to liberate our torn and beleaguered world, and it is then, that we shall be called repairers of the breach. AMEN