

Ash Wednesday
Wednesday, February 17, 2010

Today is Ash Wednesday. It is the beginning of Lent. Today begins the period of preparation leading up to the celebration of Easter.

Historically, Lent has been a period for those of us who seek to follow Jesus to work on something that can bring us closer to God. There are many who have given up something they like during Lent, so that when they think of it, when they yearn for it, they can think instead of God and how much they yearn for God and desire to be close to God.

Today I have been preparing the ashes for Ash Wednesday. I have come to realize that this is just a messy process. When I went to seminary, no one taught me how to prepare ashes. So, over two decades of ministry later, I have learned some lessons about preparing the ashes.

- (1) Ashes have a mind of their own. They fly where they want, especially if it is windy. It is best to prepare them in a place that is not windy.
- (2) Preparing ashes is best done ahead of time. Waiting for the last minute isn't a good idea.
- (3) You will get dirtier than you can imagine. Bring plenty of wash cloths.
- (4) Palm ashes have sharp objects in them if they are not sifted. People don't like sharp objects hurting them when they are being marked.
- (5) It is easier to buy sifted ashes at the religious book store.
- (6) It means more to me to prepare and sift the ashes myself.
- (7) Ashes work best if they are mixed with anointing oil.
- (8) Ashes stick forever if you use olive oil.
- (9) Ashes can dry out if you use water and don't stick all that well.
- (10) Ashes without any preparation don't stick at all.

I have come to realize that preparing the ashes has come to mean a lot to me in my preparation of observing Lent. It helps me to remember that in living a life of faith, there are times when it takes intentionality and preparation. That is why it helps me to prepare for Lent. Growing in faith, growing in our relationship with God, takes intentionality and preparation.

This is why coming to worship, being involved in a small group, being involved in acts of mission and ministry, are so important. They allow me to live with intentionality. As you get ready to observe this season of Lent, what do you want to work on to help you grow closer to God?

May God help each of us live our faith with courage and with meaning.

In the hope Jesus offers us,
Rev. Scott Carlson

The Mission of Sun Prairie United Methodist Church is to invite and welcome people to be committed and compassionate followers of Jesus Christ through worship, through spiritual growth, through fellowship and through service to others.