

Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return.

In a few minutes we will all be invited to come forward to receive the placement of ashes on our foreheads. We will hear these words.

Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return.

The ashes are to remind of us our mortality. The definition of “mortality” is the state of being mortal, destined to die. Today we are reminded of our mortality not simply in the fact that we will someday die....but mortality as in the state of being mortal.

We are mortal. We are human.

I am reminded of a pop song from my college days. The name of that song is “Human.” The lyrics of the chorus are:

I'm only human.  
Of flesh and blood, I'm made.  
Human  
Born to make mistakes.

We're only human.  
Of flesh and blood, we're made.  
Human.  
Born to make mistakes.

Today, Ash Wednesday, is the beginning of the church season of Lent. This season lasts 40 days and ends with our celebration of Easter – the resurrection of our Savior. These 40 days were originally used for fasting and prayer by two groups of people.

1. People who were preparing to be baptized into the Christian faith at Easter.
2. People who had been ex-communicated – thrown out of the church because of “notorious sins” – and were now going to be welcomed back into the community of Christ.

Through the years, Lent has become a season of prayer and thoughtful reflection for everyone – for all of us humans. I’m not sure exactly what constitutes a “notorious sin”, but we’re only human. We’re born to make mistakes. Today, we are invited to the “observance of a Holy Lent” to examine our mortality – our humanness – to reflect on the mistakes we’ve made and.....AND....to make up for those mistakes and changes our ways.

At last Thursday’s Eucharist and Sunday’s Middle School Holy Troublemakers formation class, we talked about Paula Stone Williams. Ms. Williams is a transgender woman who for the first 60 years of her life lived as man – the gender she was assigned at birth – even though at the age of four, she knew she had been born in the “wrong body”. For 35 years, living as a man, she rose in the ranks of an extremely conservative evangelical church and preached that members of the LGBTQ+ community were sinners and would go to hell.

After 35 years of preaching that hate, Ms. Williams came out as a transgender woman. She was immediately kicked out of her church. She lost everything. But she started a new congregation in Colorado and now preaches God’s love to and for everyone. She’s now 71 years old and has said, “I hope I live a long time because I’ve got a lot to make up for.”

While we, like Paula Stone Williams, are sorry for the mistakes we’ve made and we repent for the sins we’ve committed; we do not need to feel bad about being human. We do not need to feel overwhelmed with guilt when we do something wrong or something we regret.

That is the beauty of our God.

That is the beauty of our Savior, Jesus Christ, sacrificing himself for us.

We are loved as humans – we are loved FOR our humanity– and being human is enough.

Jesus lived among us as a human. Jesus didn’t seek out the perfect people – only the purest and “good” people. Jesus hung out with humans who were outcasts and called “sinners” by all those supposedly perfect people. In fact, Jesus called out those who thought themselves better than others for their hypocrisy.

Jesus meets us humans right where we are. In our messiness. In our confusion. In our depression and anxiety. In our addictions. In our sins and mistakes. Because just as we are – human – we are enough. We are all beloved children of God.

Paula Stone Williams said, “I hope I live a long time because I’ve got a lot to make up for.”

And I suggest we look at “making up for” things as more than just correcting mistakes in the past – but reaching further, loving deeper, helping more.

Now.

How about that “making up for it” begins today as we enter into the season of Lent. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation.”

Let us make use of these 40 days of Lent as an opportunity to examine our humanness and finds ways to be the best humans we can be.

Because it is in our very humanness that we are able to bring the Good News of the Gospel to this world in need. We are part of this world. We are a part of this human need for love and community – the human need for salvation and grace. Being human is an asset as we follow our call to spread the Good News of God’s love for all.

Remember that we are dust and to dust we will return.

We are human.

And as perfectly imperfect humans, let us resolve this Lent to reach further, love deeper, and help more.