

Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year A
Hopkins Charge
March 22, 2020
John 9:1-41

*Our eyes wide open
To what God can do with dust
We are not alone*

It doesn't seem possible Beloved, but Ash Wednesday was only three weeks ago. Back then, there were only about 50 cases of coronavirus in the US, and life was pretty normal.

We gathered for worship, received ashes on our foreheads, and probably didn't think much of it. Just our yearly reminder of what someone called "the fragility and uncertainty of human life." Maybe we washed off the ashes too quickly this year.

Perhaps we were too quick to brush aside the fundamental truth that we acknowledge each Lent: Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Remember that you are only human, and that your whole life can change in the blink of an eye.

We aren't likely to forget that anytime soon. The coronavirus has forced our eyes wide open. We have come face to face with the truth that life is fleeting and fragile, and that we are dust.

The Good News, Beloved, is what Jesus can do with dust and dirt and with us. Because Jesus isn't done with the dust. He used it to shape our bodies in the beginning, and at the end, he will raise us up from the dust of death.

And in our reading from John this morning, he will use it for something else. He will use dust and dirt to address a question that we keep asking. Why is this happening? What went wrong?

Notice, Beloved, that this is the first question that the disciples ask when they encounter the man blind from birth.

Teacher, what went wrong in this man's life that he was born blind?
Why has this happened to him? Is it his fault? His parents?

And while our situation is different, our questions are the same.

Teacher, what went wrong in our world that this pandemic has come?
Why is this happened to us? Is it our fault? Is it someone else's?

Right away, Jesus rules out one answer — it is not because of sin. But when it comes to giving a fuller answer to our questions, Jesus does not answer with words alone.

He reminds us about who he is, and then gets dirty. He spits into the dust of the ground, makes mud, and smears it on the eyes of blind man. And when the man has washed his face, he can see.

Jesus does the same for us, Beloved. He is not done with the dust. Indeed, it is from the dust of the ground that Jesus frees us from not being able to see what is happening around us, and allow us to see clearly. He uses the dust to open our eyes to what God is doing right here, right now.

With our eyes opened, we can turn our focus from the darkness that surrounds us to the light of the world standing in front of us.

Like the man born blind, we can see Jesus with us, trust in his love, and worship him. This is what God can do with dust, Beloved: open our eyes to see Jesus, open our hearts to receive again and again his love for us, and open our lips to give him thanks and praise.

So let us do that right now, as we affirm our faith in the words printed in the bulletin.