

## Ash Wednesday

We are stardust, we are golden, we are billion year old carbon and we got to get ourselves back to the garden. Chorus of Joni Mitchell's song "Woodstock" released in 1970 it captures something of the countercultural idealism of late 60s youth culture..a desire to re-connect with the natural world of which we are a part..rather than be taken over by the white heat of technology..atomic age into which the world had entered.

Now 50 years or so on more and more of us in the developed world taking those issues seriously in terms of the impact of climate change and need to be more ecologically aware. So last week Gazette and Herald even had a picture of this aging Rector holding up bird box in the churchyard..getting back to the garden as it were as we seek to make the grounds around our church building a richer habitat in which nature can flourish.

Ash Wednesday, long before Joni Mitchell, has been a day on which we remember we are dust. In a few moments I will invite you to come and receive in dust and ashes the mark of the cross on your forehead. The Ash has come from burning last year's Palm Crosses..in the container we have quite literally billion year old carbon..for the star dust from our sun is the material from which our planet is formed ..all life takes its substance from the elements of the earth and the destiny of our physical bodies is to return to the dust of the earth.

Everything, everyone, in the end is in a sense recycled..and the mark we receive is a visible sign of our mortality...But we are stardust, we are golden. Even our frail and mortal physicality is a thing of wonder..we are connected to every other living person, every other living thing..connected even to the inert elements from which our bodies are formed in the womb. The psalmist writes "You have created my inward parts you knit me together in my mother's womb..I am fearfully and wonderfully made..Psalm 139".

The dust of the earth to which we will return is indeed stardust..you are golden.

And if our physicality is so wonderful how much more wonderful the spiritual purposes for good which God has in store for us..our ultimate destiny not as dust of the earth, even star dust.. but in unity with the divine in Christ Jesus.

As the mark of the cross is made we hear the words "child of God from dust you came and to dust you will return, turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ".

We turn from a reliance on the unreliable vagaries of earthly things, the uncertainties of chance and change and place our faith in Christ..the solid rock on which we can stand secure and safe.

Lent is meant to be a time of reflection and contemplation of this ultimate purpose in our lives....the giving up of lent, the fasting in which many people engage, is an opportunity to wean ourselves off those material things to which we have become so attached..obsessed with even..so that we can in prayer and study discover more about God's love for us and God's grace at work in us..relying more deeply on God..than on food or drink or the pleasures and vanities that have become the objects of our attention and desire.

In these 6 weeks of Lent we have a number of things to help us...Lent course on developing a personal rule or rhythm of life more focussed on that wild and precious life God wants us to enjoy...we have a weekly walk around the church following the stations of the cross as we take on board the enormity of Christ's passion and all that Jesus has done for us..Friday late afternoon..this week at 5.00pm future weeks at 4.30pm. Thursday lent lunches in which we can sit alongside members of other churches sharing in bread and soup a simple lunch in which we can depend in faith and fellowship..and each of you has been given tonight a book of prayers and reflections produced by our diocese..if you already received one last Sunday..then give this copy to a friend or neighbour..helping them to keep a holy Lent.

Whether you are someone who is a regular church attender, or someone seeking a deeper understanding of the spiritual reality of your life, or just moved by the wonder of this awesome universe in which we are set, beauty of architecture, art and music..then this ash is for you.

Each one of us star dust..each one of us golden..made from billion year old carbon..and a destiny beyond our imagining in God's good purposes for us.