

Ash Wednesday

Psalm 51:1-17 *The Message* a paraphrase of Scripture by Eugene Peterson

51 ¹⁻³*Generous in love—God, give grace! Huge in mercy—wipe out my bad record. Scrub away my guilt, soak out my sins in your laundry. I know how bad I’ve been; my sins are staring me down.*

⁴⁻⁶*You’re the One I’ve violated, and you’ve seen it all, seen the full extent of my evil. You have all the facts before you; whatever you decide about me is fair. I’ve been out of step with you for a long time, in the wrong since before I was born. What you’re after is truth from the inside out. Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life.*

⁷⁻¹⁵*Soak me in your laundry and I’ll come out clean, scrub me and I’ll have a snow-white life. Tune me in to foot-tapping songs, set these once-broken bones to dancing. Don’t look too close for blemishes, give me a clean bill of health. God, make a fresh start in me, shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life. Don’t throw me out with the trash, or fail to breathe holiness in me. Bring me back from gray exile, put a fresh wind in my sails! Give me a job teaching rebels your ways so the lost can find their way home. Commute my death sentence, God, my salvation God, and I’ll sing anthems to your life-giving ways. Unbutton my lips, dear God; I’ll let loose with your praise.*

¹⁶⁻¹⁷*Going through the motions doesn’t please you, a flawless performance is nothing to you. I learned God-worship when my pride was shattered. Heart-shattered lives ready for love don’t for a moment escape God’s notice.*

Lent is a time of self-reflection in relationship to God and the grace God gives. Ash Wednesday begins the 40 day journey of Lent with the vivid reminder that we are mortal flesh, full of sin, and deserving of death. King David knew it. After his affair with Bathsheba, trying to trick her husband and ultimately having him killed, David was reminded of the weight of sin and the consequences of sin. When it was revealed to him that God knew what he had done, David penned the words of Psalm 51. Peterson’s paraphrase puts what David was experiencing in a picture of despair and grief. *Soak me in your laundry and I’ll come out clean, scrub me and I’ll have a snow-white life.* We need the grace of God, the mercy and forgiveness of God to cleanse us and put us back in a right relationship with God. We will die, we are humans, but the life we live can be a life that is lived under God’s grace and mercy, if we accept the honest truth of our sinful nature. Left to our own selfish ways we will hurt the ones we love, we will take advantage of the poor and weak, we will give in to the temptations of life, but when we accept the grace of God, then we can live a life that honors God’s will and desire for our life, we will seek the best for those we love and for the poor and weak, we will have a power to send the temptations away. This season of Lent, what do you need to lay at the cross and ask forgiveness for? What do you need to begin doing in your life that will help you know God more deeply? How can your life reflect the grace and forgiveness you have received?

Almighty God, we know that life comes to an end on this earth. Forgive us when we seek after those things that promise “new life” and not face death. In our lives, we seek meaning, we seek purpose—show us Your way, that we might follow in joy and obedience. In life and in our death, Lord God, may we honor You. Cover us with your grace and mercy. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.