

DEVOTIONAL: 4 – 10 February 2024

VALENTINES OF ASH - What Lent teaches us about real love

BY Juliet Vedral

Read: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; Psalm 51:1-17; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

I love that Valentine's Day falls on Ash Wednesday this year. Valentine's Day — that nuisance to single people and the unsentimental, the feast day of our culture's obsession with love and romance — is momentarily subverted by a reminder of what love really looks like: self-denial and commitment. Ash Wednesday in many ways is one of the most passionate and powerful expressions of love — God's love for us, and our love for God. (Sorry Sarah McLachlan, it's way better than chocolate.)

Ash Wednesday and Lent, the season of reflection and preparation for Easter, take love to a whole new level. Lent is a season of self-denial, a pushing away of distractions that keep us from enjoying our First Love. Clergy likes to say, when imposing ashes, "Remember that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return — and remember that you are beloved."

In other words, life is short, and too often our priorities are in complete disarray. And though Lent is a time to mourn the ways we forget God; it is also a time to remember that we are still beloved.

In our human relationships, we would do well to remember the brevity and brutality of life. We won't always have time to say "I love you" before our beloved can never hear it again. We can "stay connected" and always want to make time, but never quite get around to it; we can forget our love ones in the cruelty of the urgent, or in the demands of parenthood; we can lose our loved ones far sooner than any of us anticipate.

Valentine's Day does a great job at communicating love for one day, but it lacks the impetus or mechanism to help us do the hard work of love. And one thing required for the hard work of love is a abandonment of the very things that keep us from loving well. Ash Wednesday, with its accompanying fast, is that abandonment.

Falling in love makes you reprioritize your life. In those first blushes and crushes of human love, we can get butterflies in the pit of our stomachs; we forget to eat or lose our appetites. We can put off good things or even tasks that once seemed necessary and absolute because we cannot tear ourselves away from the object of our affection. We go into "hibernation" when we first fall in love, spending as much time with our beloved as we can.

When our beloved is God, Lent can be that hibernation period to fall in love all over again. God responds to the sin that keeps us from divine relationship, not by punishing us or withdrawing from us, but by wooing us away from other, lesser gods and back to the lover of our souls.

We even receive a special gift on Ash Wednesday. The ashes imposed on our foreheads are a sign of repentance and mourning, showing the severity with which we take our falling short. We are not supposed to display our fasting and repentance in a pious way, but we're also not supposed to wash them off.

To me, those ashes are a mark and reminder, as deep and personal as jewelry or flowers. Those ashes show that we are loved, and that our beloved's commitment to us is constant and true, even when we are not. They show that divine Love is not just about feelings or sentiments, but about death to everything that hinders it.

The ashes remind us that the heart of love is laying down one's rights and one's life for our beloved. When we first fall in love, we easily let go of things we held dear and thought we couldn't live without, because we have found something greater. I've only been married for nine months, but I can already see how the human heart can snap right back into its worst habits and desires as relationships grow comfortable and familiar. Our beloveds don't need candy or sentimental gestures. They need the passion and commitment that come from love's first awakening.

It's because of the tendency to forget our First Love — to rely on emotions and feelings instead of true sacrifice and commitment — that we need Ash Wednesday this Valentine's Day. In Jesus, God puts aside everything to make us God's beloved on the cross. This is not a sentimental gesture. It is a whole-hearted, full-throated commitment. Jesus is all in, and Lent is an invitation for us to join him.

For those who observe, may we be willing and able to say yes. Amen.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE, LET US PRAY WITH YOU & FOR YOU

- **Mr. Len McGinnis** is recovering from a cardiac procedure and has returned home; he is recovering comfortably. Precious Lord, we entrust the recovery of Mr. Len into Your hands. May Your healing power bring swift and complete restoration. Grant Mr. Len and Ms. Shelia strength, patience, and a spirit of resilience during this time of recovery. Let Your love be a source of unity and hope during this time. Thank You for Your faithfulness. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen. Please extend prayers of encouragement and support to: **Mr. Len and Mrs. Shelia McGinnis, 655 Village Green Way #201, WB 53090.**
- **Mrs. Nancy Whitson** extends her grateful appreciation to you for taking the time to send cards of love and support. Cards and notes of encouragement and support can be mailed to: **Mrs. Nancy Whitson, Aria of Brookfield, 18740 West Bluemound Road, Room 103, Brookfield, WI 53045.**
- **Bro. Bob Krell** is deep-rooted in our hearts and prayers as we shower him and the Family with our love, care, and support. Lord Jesus Christ, by your patience in suffering you hallowed earthly pain and gave us the example of obedience to God's will. Be near me in my time of weakness and pain; sustain me by your grace, that my strength and courage may not fail; heal me according to you will; and help me always to believe that what happens to me here is of little account if you hold me in eternal life, my Lord and my God. Amen. Cards and notes of love and encouragement can be mailed to: **Mr. Bob and Mrs. Jean Krell, 804 Lenora Drive, West Bend, WI 53090.**
- **Mrs. Sandy Wamser** is grateful for your continued prayers, support, and love Ms. Sandy was diagnosed with aggressive Glioblastoma. Ms. Sandy has resumed chemotherapy in addition to Tumor Treating Fields (TTF) Therapy. Dear Lord, we ask with all our heart, please touch these special lives, Ms. Sandy and Mr. Pat. Bless them with courage and hope, may they find comfort and consolation in your loving embrace. We earnestly pray for healing in body, mind, and spirit. Let their hope shine a hallowed light that burns forever to honor their spirited fight. Cards and notes can be sent to: **Mr. Pat and Mrs. Sandy Wamser, 3742 Pleasant Valley Road, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- On February 2, 2024, God looked around his Garden and found an empty place. He then looked down upon God's earth and saw **Mrs. Margaret "Marge" Louise Pok's** loving face. God put his arms around her and lifted her to rest. God's Garden must be beautiful, God always takes the best. Ms. Marge left us precious memories, her love will be our guide; you'll live on through your children, you'll always be by our side. It broke our hearts to lose you, but you did not go alone.

For part of us went with you on the day God called you home. Mr. Dean, Ms. Carol, and Family, we extend our sincerest and heartfelt sympathies to you all. The Family has planned a Celebration of Life Service for Mr. Jerry and Mrs. Marge Pok on Saturday, May 4, 2024, at Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church. The Visitation will be from noon until 2:00 p.m., with a Celebration of Life Service, cake, and refreshments following services. Cards of love and support can be mailed to: **Mr. Dean and Mrs. Carol Pok, 1915 Hwy 28 E., Kewaskum, WI 53040.**

- With sincerest heartfelt sadness and condolences to Mr. Dean Pok, Mrs. Carol Pok, and the Pok Family, we share the passing of their patriarch, **Mr. Jerry Pok** who God whispered his name on January 23, 2024, and lovingly welcomed Mr. Jerry to his eternal home. Let us pray: Jesus, I feel such absence, please be present. I feel such loss, please be here. I feel such sadness, please be my sanctuary. I feel such pain, please be with me. Jesus, I feel such loneliness, please be beside me. I feel such heartache, please be close. I feel such doubt, please be faithfulness. I feel such guilt, please lead me home. The loss has consumed me. I come as I am. Please be my everything. I just take your hand. Amen. Cards and notes of condolences can be mailed to: **Mr. Dean and Mrs. Carol Pok, 1915 Hwy 28 E., Kewaskum, WI 53040.**

- Ms. Dina Roberts, daughter of **Mr. Wallace (Wally) and Mrs. Geraldine (Gerry) Ritterbusch**, prayerfully and hopefully ask that we shower her dad, Mr. Wally, with 100 birthday cards in Celebration of his **100th birthday**, (Mr. Wally's Birthday is February 29th), **during the week of February 22nd to March 1st**. Please mail Birthday and Celebration cards to: **Mr. Wallace (Wally) and Mrs. Geraldine (Gerry) Ritterbusch**, 524 Tamarack Court, West Bend WI 53095.
- **Mr. Gerald Wallace "Jerry" Loebe's** Celebration of Life Service will take place on Friday, February 2nd at Living Hope Presbyterian Church, (Dickson Hollow) W156 N4881 Pilgrim Rd from 10:00 AM until the time of memorial service at 11:00 a.m. In lieu of flowers, please consider a memorial in memory of Mr. Jerry to Milwaukee Rescue Mission.
- Losing a beloved sister-in-law is one of life's greatest tragedies. We extend our heartfelt sympathies and love to Mrs. Betty Clement and her brother-in-law, Mr. Donald L. Wachuta for their loss of **Mrs. Pattie C. Wachuta**. Please know that we are always here for you, Ms. Betty, and Mr. Donald during this difficult time. Whatever you need, we're here to help in any way that we can. Gracious God, source of all life, we come before You in somber hearts. We grieve the death of our Ms. Pattie and entrust her soul unto Your divine hands. Give us, O Loving God, strength to accept this loss and remember her life fondly. May our prayers guide her on the journey to Your heavenly kingdom where she may find eternal peace. As written in Psalm 23:1 "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Be our comfort, blessed Provider, in this time of sorrow. Amen. Cards of condolences can be mailed to: **Mrs. Betty Clement, 6822 Enge Drive, West Bend, WI 53090, and Mr. Donald Wachuta, 7180 N. River Road, West Bend, WI 53090.**
- We extend our condolences to Mrs. MaryLou on the passing of her brother, **Mr. Ralph Gelhar**, on January 20th. Our thoughts prayers and love are showered on Ms. MaryLou during this season of grief and loss. Please send cards and notes of care and love to: **Mrs. MaryLou Himes, 1800 Annie St. #, WB 53090.**
- We continue our prayer vigil for **Mr. Dennis Liepert** on his extensive journey of recovery. Creator God, your children humbly come as intercessory for Bro. Dennis and Ms. Tammy to ask that You would work a full recovery in Bro. Dennis' body - whatever is causing this persistent problem. We believe and look forward to better times for them. Give Bro. Dennis strength and encouragement; he can endure anything with You by his side. We pray that You would, in Your mercy, give him back the health and strength he needs. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Cards and notes of love and support can be mailed to: **Mr. Dennis and Mrs. Tammy Liepert, 7361 Tower Drive, West Bend, WI 53090.**
- Healing and supporting prayers for **Mr. Robert (Bob) and Mrs. Joy Kuhaupt**. Both Mr. Bob and Ms. Joy are experiencing significant health challenges and ask for your caring and supportive prayers. Card and notes can be mailed to: **Mr. Robert and Mrs. Joy Kuhaupt, Sussex Mills Apts., W240 N6345 Maple Ave., #116, Sussex, WI 53089.**
- **Mrs. MaryLou Himes** is still recovering from eye surgery but 50% of her eyesight has returned; the ophthalmologist feels more of her eyesight may return as healing continues. Ms. MaryLou will still have to have another eye surgery soon. We beseech You, Lord, to touch the body and eyes of the Ms. MaryLou with Your healing hand. Guide the process of recovery, restoring vision and optimal health. Lord, during this period, we ask that you grant Ms. MaryLou the gift of peace that calms worries, and the patience to wait for Your perfect timing. Holding on to this faith, we offer up this prayer in the powerful name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Cards and notes of encouragement can be mailed to: **Mrs. MaryLou Himes, 1800 Annie Street, #4, West Bend, WI 53090.**
- **Ms. Mary Rogge** continues healing from Rotator cuff surgery. Ms. Mary is appreciative for your cards and notes of encouragement and love. We give God thanks for Mr. Roger and the Family, who are supporting and caring for Ms. Mary. Cards and notes of love and encouragement can be mailed to: **Mr. Roger and Mrs. Mary Rogge, 4436 Magna Vista Drive, Jackson, WI 53037.**
- **Mr. Michael Cahoon**, son of Mr. Jim and Mrs. Sandy Cahoon, has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and is still on a journey of treatments. We pray that You will bless the means used for Mr. Michael's recovery and those who administer them. Grant that his sickness may be to his spiritual benefit and that he may live the rest of his life more faithfully according to Your will. For You are the source of life and healing and to You we give praise and glory, now and forever. Amen. Cards and notes filled with prayers encouragement can be sent to: **Mr. Michael Cahoon, C/O: Mr. Jim and Mrs. Sandy Cahoon, 1615 Beverly Lane, WI 53090.**

- Prayers of strength and courage for **Mr. Tom Damp**. Dear God, please give Mr. Tom strength when he is weak, love when he feels forsaken, courage when he's afraid, wisdom when he feels unwise, comfort when he feels all alone, hope when he feels rejected, and peace when Mr. Tom is in turmoil. Amen. Card and notes can be mailed to: **Mr. Tom Damp, 1707 Sunset Ridge Drive, West Bend WI 53095**.
- We give thanks and praise that **Mr. Ben Barth**, husband of Ms. Heather Wolf, granddaughter of Mr. Roger and Mrs. Mary Rogge. recipient of a new heart and new lungs- give thanks for your continued prayers and support. O God, You have told me in your Word to "be strong and of a good courage" and to "fear not". You have said that "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me." In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen. Please overwhelm Mr. Ben with cards and notes for continued healing, strength, and restoration. Correspondence can be mailed to: **Mr. Ben and Mrs. Heather Barth, 223 South 11th Ave., West Bend, WI 53095**.
- We remain in prayer and support for **Mrs. Ann Cording**. Thank You, Provider God, for giving me all that I need. Thank You for inviting me to come to You any time with all my needs and requests. Thank You for your Word to lead, guide, and direct me. Loving God, I come to You now asking for wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit for the decisions I have to make in my life. You have told me in your Word that if I lack wisdom I should ask because You give to all who ask for wisdom generously. Thank You for being true to your Word. In the name of Jesus, Amen. Cards and notes of love and care can be mailed to: **Mrs. Ann Cording, 1416 S. Silverbrook Drive, West Bend WI 53095**.
- **Mr. Chuck Rogge** is still on a journey of healing. He is grateful for the cards and notes of support. Please continue to flood the mailbox with love and support to: **Mr. Chuck and Mrs. Sue Rogge, 5011 Hwy. P, West Bend, WI 53095**.
- **Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf**, appreciates your continued prayers for healing and strength as she continues to struggle with illness. You can send emails of prayers and support to: alankempf33@gmail.com; or cards and notes to **Mr. Allan and Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf, 414B. South Pleasantview Road, Plymouth, WI 53073; phone number: 920.838.1830**.

We continue to celebrate our 175th year of service, commitment and Methodism in West Bend, Wisconsin.

"Honoring Our Past, Celebrating Our Present, Anticipating Our Future"

Prayer of Meditation: Have you ever been on a roller coaster at an amusement park? These rides are very similar to the Christian life...climbs and accelerations! First, there's time spent waiting in line. Like for Moses, who had to spend 40 years keeping sheep in the desert before returning to accomplish his call in Egypt, we don't know how long the waiting may last. God is preparing us, one step at a time, to enter the blessings of the exciting life that God has prepared for us.

Then comes the climbing. Oppositions are there, and everything is trying to pull us down. But God is pulling us up, towards our calling. He promised us: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9) And then comes the moment of suspension just before being propelled forward by God, we're at the highest point, close to God. Finally, the moment of acceleration arrives! It's there that God chooses to "propel" us into the world to accomplish our calling: moving forward and blessing others.

To experience acceleration, the key is: waiting and holding on to God until God sends us.

Today, why not pray this short prayer for your life: "Lord, I trust You, no matter the step I'm currently going through. Your grace accompanies and equips me for the calling You have entrusted to me, and I can continue to move forward in the blessed, exciting life that You have for me. Amen!"

Have a beautiful day in God's presence!

Pastor Clarissa & Bro. Martin