

Wednesday, February 17

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Ash Wednesday. A day we join with our community of faith and remind each other that we are all mortal, from the dust. One day to return to dust. In any given year, that is a powerful reminder which serves to ground us and help us enter Lent with a spirit of contemplation.

It doesn't feel the same to me this year. In 2020, I journeyed on the roller coaster of providing healthcare in an ever-evolving pandemic. I am a hospital chaplain. At first, protective gear and N95 masks were too precious to take away from the hands-on providers involved in the work of saving life. I spent time on the phone with families, describing what I saw. Praying over the airwaves instead of hand-in-hand. Bearing witness.

Humanity is nothing if not adaptable, and we adjusted. Donning gear from refreshed stocks, I and other chaplains are now able to be present, to hold hands through gloves, to do what we feel called to do. It has been a lot. Life and death are constant in hospitals, but this pandemic tipped the balance in ways none of us have seen before. Yet we persevere. We continue calling out to God, praying many prayers, sharing tears, and finding those precious moments of laughter and feelings of important work well done.

In Genesis 2:7, God creates humankind by taking dust from the ground. I choose to think of that passage as describing the material which science captures in such complexity: atoms, elements, compounds, and organic matter. God took those basic building blocks of creation...and did something special. God breathed into our dust the breath of life. We are "living, breathing things."

From the dust we come. But it is sacred dust... I don't think I will ever take that for granted again. We have our time in this world – time to use our dust-made bodies and feel the breath of God surge in our chests. It is a sad thing when that breath leaves for the last time. When our dust rejoins the dust which makes all things and keeps this universe going. God's paint palette. Even in the sadness, or perhaps some time after, I find gratitude for the life lived with that breath. For all the impact each person makes in this creation: loving, living, building and dreaming. May God bless that. May God bless us all. May we remember the sacredness of our dust.