**Ash Wednesday**

**Significant Problem—Last Day in the Garden**

Text: Genesis 3:19

**Sermon Outline**

You Are Dust, and to Dust You Shall Return.

I. Adam and Eve return to dust.

II. We return to dust.

III. God remembered that we return to dust.

IV. God does not leave us in the dust.

**Sermon**

**Next to Good Friday, today is the most somber day on the Christian calendar. Ash Wednesday is the day when we remember, as I asked you to remember just a few minutes ago when I imposed ashes on your forehead, that we are dust and to dust we shall return.**

**But what do I mean when I say that to you? We’re remembering a tragically significant day in human history, a day that necessitated everything we’ll talk about through this entire season of Lent. The day that created for us THE significant problem: To dust you shall return. That statement is a direct quote from Gen 3:19:**

**“You Are Dust, and to Dust You Shall Return.”**

**I.**

**There God is addressing Adam immediately after the fall into sin in the Garden of Eden. He is informing Adam of all the negative consequences of his and Eve’s disobedience in eating the fruit of the tree from which God had instructed them not to eat. God had warned Adam and Eve that if they ate the fruit from that tree they shall surely die. But they did not obey God and instead followed the tempting words of Satan, eating the fruit from that tree.**

**And from that day on, death followed, just as God said it would. Adam had been formed by God from the dust of the ground. And God’s statement to Adam, “You are dust,” acknowledged his creation of Adam from the dust of the ground. Then the words “to dust you shall return” acknowledged Adam’s pending physical death and the decay and returning to the ground that death would bring. Adam was formed from the ground, and Adam would return to the ground. “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.” I’m sure Adam did not say, “Oh, I didn’t think of that.” For he knew full well what would happen. God was now reminding him.**

**There is also an eternal spiritual death that the sin of Adam and Eve brought into the world that day. An eternal estrangement and separation from God. Banishment from him, his love, his mercy, and his compassion. Adam would live the rest of his days remembering those sobering words from God. How he must have wished that he could turn the hands of time back and undo what he and Eve had done; but it *was* done. (I wonder if he apologizes to everyone who comes to heaven?) We are in time and you can’t turn back the clock. God said, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.**

**II.**

**Unfortunately, you and I are conceived and born facing the same problem that Adam did following his sin. As Paul writes in Romans 5, “Therefore, . . . sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom 5:12). That statement made by God to Adam is just as valid when spoken to us: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”**

***Significant* problem! But we don’t like to think about it, do we? Our own death, the fact that we will one day go into the earth, is not something we like to remember. It makes us uncomfortable. And our society makes it quite easy to avoid remembering that we are dust. From advertising, to books, to movies, so often the impression is given that life in this world goes on forever, that we are invincible, that somehow, we are the exception to death! We convince ourselves that maybe if we don’t think about it, we can *somehow* avoid it. And so many people go through life avoiding that one final earthly reality until they are right at death’s doorstep. God reminds us all today and, on that day, “To dust you shall return.”**

**And so, as people who remember that we are dust, we gather here on this Ash Wednesday and repent of our sin. We confess; we admit before God and one another our sin and our sinfulness. We express our sorrow for our sin. We ask God to forgive our sin. We ask God to help us amend our sinful life and live a more God-pleasing life.**

**III.**

**And yet, even more important than *you* remembering that you are dust, is the fact that *God* remembered that you are dust. In Psalm 103, the psalmist informs us that God “knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust” (Ps 103:14). And in the Scriptures, whenever God *remembers* his people, he always *acts* on behalf of his people, to bless his people.**

**In fact, God had already remembered us and all of his people even before he told Adam, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Because just four verses before God spoke these words to Adam, that very same significant day, God spoke to Satan and assured Satan that God was going to send one who would crush Satan’s head. God had His eternal plan.**

**Remembering that we are dust, God did act on behalf of us and all people. He came here and lived among us in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. Christ completely and voluntarily took upon himself all sin and all evil, even the penalty for sin and evil: death itself. He himself went into the earth, into the dust of the ground, as he was buried in a tomb. Worst of all, he endured the penalty of spiritual death there on the cross as he was abandoned and forsaken by his Father and cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46).**

**IV.**

**But he would not remain in the dust of the earth. On the third day, he would rise from the dust of the earth, just as he predicted he would. And so will you. On the day when he returns, you and all believers in Jesus Christ will rise from the dust of the earth with new, glorified bodies. Bodies that are incorruptible, no longer subject to sin. Bodies that are immortal, no longer subject to death. Bodies just like Christ’s!**

**And that is why we did not simply place ashes on your forehead tonight in any old pattern. We did so in the shape of a cross. For only in the cross of Christ and what occurred there do we have hope and life. We have His promise that we, along with all those in Him, will be with Him, united body and soul in heaven.**

**There’s an old expression that maybe you’re familiar with: “Left in the dust.” For example, when there’s a race taking place and one runner pulls away from the other, the announcer might say that the runner who pulled away “left the other runner in the dust.” In other words, he left the runner behind.**

**We give thanks that God has not “left us in the dust.” He has not abandoned us in our deadly significant problem. He has not left us behind. Just the opposite is the case. He came here in the person of Jesus Christ to make certain that we would be lifted from the dust of the earth. Just as Christ rose physically, bodily, from the grave, so we, too, will join him “in a resurrection like his” (Rom 6:5). God will not leave us in the dust.**

 **We pray, “Come Lord Jesus, quickly, for many of us are waiting, and none of us shall be disappointed.” Amen.**