

February 17, 2010

**Ash Wednesday – 7:30 p.m.**

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia

*The Rev'd Elizabeth Shows Caffey, associate rector*

In a few minutes, we will each be invited to come forward to be visibly and undeniably marked by the cross of mortality. Tonight, we remember that we were created by God out of the dust of the earth and one day we will each return into that earth and become but dust again. It is a reality for each of us and we would probably much prefer to push it out of our minds. But today, we set aside this time to remind ourselves not only of our own mortality, but to remind ourselves that our value, our worth is not found in the status and privilege we might achieve. Status and privilege so easily fade away. Our worth is found in God's love for us, a love that is eternal and never-failing. Jesus invites his followers to turn their hearts toward that which is eternal, to focus their energy on the things that will last. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Tonight, we will each have the sign of the cross placed on our foreheads, "remember that you are dust..." Huh...

I was dust last year, and the year before that, and the year before that. That I am dust is eternal – it will last. Our public issues may change, the challenges in our personal lives will change, but some things remain the same, some things are eternal. From the moment that we are marked with the sign of the cross at our baptism, we are marked as Christ's own forever. And nothing can separate us from the love of God. It does not fade or rust, it can not be stolen or corrupted. God's love is eternal.

Our fidelity to that eternal love can waffle as we become distracted and our focus is drawn away from God and onto things that are temporary. And so as Lent begins, we are invited into a period of examination, an intentional time for us to look at our relationship with God and examine our own failings in that relationship. Through self-examination we can come to recognize where our focus and our priorities have become askew. Lent is a time set apart to realign our lives to reflect more fully the desire of our hearts, the desire to reconcile ourselves with God.

We wear these ashes on our foreheads as a reminder of our mortality, of the impermanence of our mortal life. While this is a somber and solemn symbol, within it there is hope. We wear the sign of the cross, which reminds us that in Christ we have been promised a new hope. Through Christ's triumph over death and his resurrection

we have been promised a new life after our mortal lives have ended, a life lived in the eternal presence of the God of eternal love.

This evening, as we wear the ashes in a cross on our foreheads may we remember that the source of our being, the God of life and love is calling us to things eternal. Let us take the time to set aside those barriers that prevent us from opening our hearts to accept fully the grace and restorative love offered freely to us by God.