

## **A Dusty Valentine**

Ash Wednesday & Valentine's Day  
1 Cor. 13 & Psalm 51

### **Slide: cross and heart**

*Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust.  
If you're not my Valentine, my  
Lent will be crushed.*

*Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust.  
Being my Valentine is an Ash  
Wednesday must.*

These are some of the memes that have been going around social media this week. Ash Wednesday is enough of a major day in a faithful life, but when it collides with Valentine's Day, at first glance it may seem like a real paradox, a contradiction, or at best, a jarring juxtaposition. Ash Wednesday focuses upon repentance, sin, and our mortality while as Valentine's Day focuses upon roses, chocolate, cards, and the celebration of usually romantic love.

Ash Wednesday is a religious observation.  
Valentine's Day is a secular day

where pink hearts abound. Ashes represent our mortality. The hearts of Valentine's Day seem to focus on that breathless present moment of love that seems eternal – can they mix? Ought they? Should we even try to? Is it a problem for Christians on such a solemn day to also enter into a lighthearted, sometimes silly secular holiday? How in the world can we reconcile the two extremes?

Actually, by not trying to...because there is no need.

### **Slide: Valentine's Candy**

Yes, I get it. There are people who will want to separate them. And, yes, they are two separate holidays, one of them barely even resembling a religious overtone. Sure, St. Valentine was an actual Christian priest who was martyred for the Christian faith for secretly marrying couples who were actually banned from marrying by the Roman emperor Claudius the 2<sup>nd</sup>, but that's where the religious overtones pretty much end.

And, yes, I know...Valentine's Day is all pink, bouncy and glittery, whereas Ash Wednesday is thoughtful, serious, and somber. And, certainly Valentine's Day stresses the imperfect love humans have for one another, primarily romantic, but also of family and friends, at least according to Hallmark - while as Ash Wednesday is about the divine love of God expressed in the sending of a Son to die for us, a love that is perfect.

#### **Slide: Heart and Cross**

These two days: that of unreliable and often self-serving love verses the unfailing love of a God willing to struggle with us, live with us, and die for us - They seem contrary.

Except they aren't, not really. The connection of the two is the reason why we are able to show any love to each other, because Christ first loved us. When our love for each other fails, and it will, we look to Christ to see what that perfect love looks like, and in

that, we find perfect forgiveness at our falling short.

Today, we begin our Lent with the acknowledgement of our sinfulness, but during the time of Lent, we don't stay there. We are not called to stay there. Out of that repentance comes our call to love:

**"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."**

#### **Slide: Happy VaLENTine**

Love is what this day is all about after all - God's love for us. And, if God loves us, we look to loving perfectly as God does. We do fail to do that, which is why Ash Wednesday is so necessary, but we don't stay in the ashes. We begin there. There we find a dusty valentine from God, a valentine whereby dust lives because of the love of Jesus Christ.

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust may seem final, but in Christ, there is a promise of more, a promise that we do not just end when we take our final breaths. But, it's also a promise that in the here and now, even when life can sometimes seem like the taste of ash, a loving God knows us and has known what it is like to taste death and the fear of it, too.

When you hear the word "Lent", what do you think? A sooty smudge on your forehead? Giving something up? Adding something? Other forms of self-denial, almsgiving and prayer? Those may all be a part of Lent, but they are not the main point. In fact, you can observe Lent without doing any of those things, although doing those things can increase the reminder of your need for God.

However you observe Lent, the ultimate purpose of the practice of observing this day and the next forty days is to grow closer to God; to know that God has a plan for you here, now and beyond even into eternal life and has a desire to be in a growing relationship

with you; to experience a renewal of love for the God who first loved you. That's why the meaning of the word Lent is actually "springtime".

Like spring, Lent is a season of growth, a growth that stems first from a place of love. Today, we remember our mortality, that we are sinful creatures, and that we need God beyond this day, this life, and into the next. But, we also RISE from the ashes of this day to bring a new springtime to our spiritual lives.

**Slide: Remember that you...**

So, given that this day really IS about love after all, where is God calling you to grow in love these next six weeks? In what way is God calling you out of the ashes for the sake of love that is patient and kind for you, for those around you, and for the world? What dusty valentine can come forth from today's solemn celebration of springtime for you; For Christ does indeed love you perfectly...and oh what a wondrous love that is.

Thanks be to God.