

Well, good morning once again everyone, and I hope you have all been staying warm as we begin the season of Lent. In his sermon blog this week, Scott Hozee reminds us that the season of Lent begins with in the wilderness... Jesus goes out to be baptized by wild eyed locust eating John and then he is immediately taken further into the wilderness so that he might fast, pray, and be tempted... Hozee also mentions that biblically speaking, the wilderness is often a sign of danger... That there is a threat to life... If we were to look all the way back to Genesis one, we would find this sort of chaos as God moves over the formless earth... God creates light, and separates the waters as he begins the process of bringing order into the chaos...

If we briefly turn our attention toward our Old Testament lesson. We see God speaking with Noah and his family in the aftermath of the great flood. It is here that we are reminded of the chaos that happens when the waters that God had separated are allowed to run wild... Now... There are all sorts of interesting and at times problematic theological implications when it comes to God in the Old Testament. But as I don't want to get bogged down, on the difference between story and history, or inerrancy vs. inspiration, I simply want to focus on the idea that, there are

times in our lives, when we are surrounded by chaos... I think if anything the last year has taught us that the wilderness can come for any one of us, at any time... So my question then... is this... Where, in the midst of chaos... Do we find life and hope???

Every year around this time, the church celebrates Ash Wednesday where year after year, we repeat the words; "remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return." It's chilling in a way if you think about it. The finitude of death that is... but I also believe that there is power in naming things... And the power that we get from naming our own mortality, from naming death, is that we can then begin to look for hope...

And I believe that the hope that we are looking for begins to make itself known to us, as we purposefully journey into a spiritual wilderness during this holy season of Lent... Because not only is chaos found in the wilderness... But the wilderness also happens to be the place that God so often seems to show up...

And so it is here in the wilderness of Lent where we join with Christians all over the world, journeying once again through

fasting and prayer toward the triumphant entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday... We then celebrate the Last Supper with Jesus and his disciples on Maundy Thursday... Being transported through time and space as we hear Jesus once again predict his death and betrayal... We also witness with the rest of the disciples that even though Judas would soon complete his betrayal, Jesus even still shares with him the spiritual food and drink of new and unending life in the form of bread and wine... We are then transported to Good Friday... Good Friday... And the cross... The cross... where the lamb of God, Jesus Christ would give his life for the sins of the world... The cross... An instrument inflicting the pinnacle of chaos and the finality of death... From the first day of Lent, until the last, we are filled with the knowledge that when we die, we all eventually return to the earth from which we are made... Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return...

A wonderful Lenten reflection I once read, focused on the connection between Ash Wednesday and lament: The author writes that We lament that we have not loved God with our whole heart... We lament that we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves...

We lament things we've done... and we lament things we've left undone... But most of all, we lament... the chaos of our mortality... And we are gifted a direct and genuine connection to the knowledge and fact that we... are not... God...

And so... We make our confessions... We make our confessions and confess that we have treated people as things, and we have treated things as if they were precious and valuable people.

This is how we examine our priorities and refocus ourselves out of the chaos and into the hope we find in our Love of God, our love for our neighbors, and our partnering with God in the mission to build his kingdom here on earth, as it is in heaven... And we do this by once again choosing the way of the cross, the way of sacrifice... The way of the second person of the trinity, Jesus Christ.....

But in the back of our minds, it is always good to remember that Lent while a season focused on chaos, is also, very much, a season of hope... Hope that through a horrible and unjust death on a cross, death itself, has been defeated. Hope, that just as Jesus rose from the grave on the third

day, we too, just as we have risen from the waters of baptism, will rise into life everlasting. Hope that though we are dust and to dust we shall all return, dust does not mean endless chaos... Yes, hope... Hope that one day, we will all rise to life eternal, where not only every knee will bow and every tongue confess, but where every tear will be wiped away, and death will be no more... Hope that even as we stand at the foot of the grave, even as we focus on the chaos and the finality of death for these forty days... we know that we can cling to Jesus Christ and know... That dust and ashes... will not... Be... The end...

Amen