

March 2021 Reflection



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I find myself missing the rituals of Lent quite a bit. Many of us are unable to attend services, and if we do, so much of the “body-ness” has had to be removed for safe distancing concerns – no one putting ashes on our foreheads, no oils of healing on our hands, no washing of feet, no kissing of the cross, no embracing in peace.

I felt the loss acutely beginning with Ash Wednesday. I was not able to attend the prayer service in person, instead I watched a live broadcast on my phone. I missed the people, the earthiness and grit of the ashes, the touch of the cross traced with conviction on my forehead. I missed the words, “Remember that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return.”

I find these words strangely comforting for it reminds me not of the grave nor of what is lost or missing; rather it reminds me of returning home, returning back to the place each of us began. With our growing knowledge of the universe, we sometimes talk about how all matter at one

time or another was stardust. I rather like thinking of Ash Wednesday as a reminder that we are stardust, and unto stardust we shall return.

The scientists have a lot to say about stardust, but I am captivated by the great Canadian singer/song-writer Joni Mitchell and her take on stardust from her 1969 song “Woodstock”. What she says speaks to the awesome mystery of Lent.

*We are stardust
Billion year old carbon
We are golden
Caught in the devil's bargain
And we've got to get ourselves
back to the garden*

When biblical writers (and perhaps Joni Mitchell too) talk about the Garden, they are talking about returning home – not home to a utopian place that existed before Adam and Eve made a deal with the devil – but home to a God who calls us to God’s very self – our truest home. A God who knows us and loves us dearly as “beloved.”

“Yet I will not forget you,” God says to us. “See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.”

It's as if God is saying – *Look, you are so much a part of me that I have marked you on my very body. I bear the mark of you. I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.*

When God continues in the Isaiah passage saying, “your walls are continually before me,” perhaps God is saying, *And you know what? I see your walls. I see all of the things that distance you from others, from me and from yourself. And, I cannot forget you. I love you and you are part of me.*

Lent then is a precious time for us to acknowledge our own inherent “stardust” – our being part of the whole of God’s sacred creation and of God’s very self. With joy this Lent, let us return home to God. Let us open our hearts, forgive, love and heal. This is God’s call to each of us.

-Julie Vieira, IHM