

Lent 2024: Bigger Than Me

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My theme for this lent IN my preaching and worship planning (and just sort of what I'm thinking about) is "Bigger Than Me."

And Lent is a perfect time to explore the smaller side of ourselves, or at least the less inflated side. Let's call it that, the less inflated side of our lives, right? Getting back to simplicity, remembering that we're not perfect, we're not God, we're not infallible. We are not the center of the universe. No matter how much our lives and our careers and our families and our social medias and all of our desires and wants may suggest it to us, we are not the center of the universe. And so Lent is a time to explore humility and self-denial and try to find a little bit more of a deflated size. Not too deflated, but just sort of the right size for a mortal human being to be. Because I would suggest to you that one of the greatest spiritual realizations that it is possible for a human being to have—a mountaintop moment, something that when you feel it, you will remember it for the rest of your days—is to find your proper size and to realize that there is something so much bigger than me surrounding you and within you.

The imposition of ashes, which we all just did with one another, is a perfect example of a Lenten activity that we do together to remind ourselves of our smallness, to sort of deflate ourselves down to the proper spiritual size. The ashes remind us that we are dust: from dust we came, and to dust we shall return. Maybe you were thinking very highly of yourselves before you came in today and you

were thinking, “Man, I really pulled it all off at work, and I got dinner on the table, got the kids fed, got 'em in here, I'm king of the world. I'm doing it all!” and then you remember: from ashes you came, to ashes you shall return. It's about finding your proper spiritual size.

But then we also have to remember the ashes that we came from, the dust that we came from when God formed us from the dust of the ground in the Garden of Eden, God just didn't put us together like a sculpture and then leave us alone. God reached down into the ground where we were formed and breathed life into us, the very breath of God, Spirit. And so what are we? Are we just dust? No, we're dirt, clay from the ground, from the earth, and we're the Spirit of God mixed together in some mysterious, beautiful way.

In a moment, we're going to have communion together. And communion is another opportunity for us to remember our proper side. The imposition of the ashes tonight reminds us that there is something bigger than me because I'm finding my proper size. I'm getting down to the right size, the humble size, the size that knows I'm not the center of the universe. And then part two, just as important, we come to this table, the table that is God's sustenance for us. God's food for us. The table that contains the body and the blood of Jesus Christ, where God calls us for communion to be with God intimately sitting and eating. And we eat God, take God into our bodies, so that God now is inside of us.

It was the German philosopher, Feuerbach, a materialist, an atheist, who gave the saying which in English comes down to us from him as, “You are what you eat.” And we think of this a lot of times in terms of diet. Don't eat junk food. But he actually meant that the world is just material. And this big question of what does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be human? What am I? What am I? He said, no, no, no. It's just whatever you eat. You're just an animal. You're just a physical process consuming physical things. You are what you eat. There's no more mystery than that. If you eat beets, you're made of beets. If you eat pigs, you're made of pigs. There's no spirit, there's no soul. You are what you eat. But as Christians, we come to this table and we eat God! God is within!

So the theme for this Lent is bigger than me, and it's a much needed medicine for people in our world to remember that we are not the center of the universe. And yet at the very same time, we remember that the ashes that we came from were infused with the very Spirit and breath of God. That is what I am. That is what you are. And we remember at the communion table that we take God into our body through God's own grace in a miracle of sacrament.

Bigger than me means finding my right size. And from that place of self-denial, sacrifice, and humility (a little bit smaller probably than we were the week before) we begin to see our true greatness—that we are surrounded by God's Spirit and that the kingdom of God is within.