

'Where Grief and Hope Meet' Ash Wednesday February 18th, 2026

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent: a season defined not a time to be triumphant but to bring honest grief before God and the steady, patient hope of knowing God's mercy. In Matthew we find Jesus unpacking the rhythms of a life that isn't one of show and narcissism but more toward faithfulness, humility and grace. He names three practices, alms giving, prayer, fasting and not to seek treasures – four things we can do privately, without boasting, not to attract praise, but to align our hearts closely with God. Between the lines of these instructions, we can sense where grief and hope meet.

Ash Wednesday starts with a sign of mortality and humility: ashes marking our need. Jesus speaks to the impulse to perform piety so others can see us. the grief here is not about being notice4d for a moment of religious discipline; it's about naming our own smallness before God – the times we have sought approval, the ways we have hidden our missteps, the failures that compound when we pretend everything is fine when it actually isn't. When we give alms (money), we might feel a bit of sting – we can't help but be reminded that our resources are limited and vulnerable. When we pray, the inward ache can surface as we confess our dependence, our tangled motives, and the ways we try to curate our spiritual images to suit our agenda. When we fast, the body speaks truth: hunger, fatigue, longing. When we seek to store our treasures, we are leaving ourselves open to be dependent on our own resources rather than depend on the Holy Spirit for our needs to be covered. It also means that we have the capacity to close our minds to follow Jesus because our treasures bind us to where we are and what we have. Grief in this context is honest; it refuses the illusion that we can earn God's favour through spectacular ritual.

Yet the grief Jesus names isn't the last word. He immediately orients us towards hope by turning our focus concern towards our motivation and secrecy. If we give, pray, fast or seek our treasures to be witnessed by other people, we miss the point; but if our inner life – our longing, our contrition, our trust stays connected to Christ who sees in secret, then our grief becomes a doorway rather than a trap. The private, hidden place where we meet God becomes a space where true transformation happens. It's there, in the quiet of the heart, that hope begins to breath: not a guaranteed outcome, but a trustworthy relationship in which God notices, bless, forgives, and sustains.

In the same breath, Matthew anchors us in a hope that isn't dependent on an outward display. Where treasures are, there grief will be shaped by the possibility of loss but hope anchors us in heaven's economy—a grace that endures beyond appearances. Jesus invites us to store up treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys nor thieves break in. This is not a promise of easy results, but a promise of a future where God's reckoning and mercy triumph. Our grief, faced honestly, is transformed by the horizon of grace: God's steadfast love holds our beginnings and our endings, our failures and our faithfulness.

As we begin Lent, let the ashes remind us of mortality and the need for mercy. Let the practices—done in humility and in secret where possible—cultivate an attitude of dependent hope. May our grief over brokenness widen into a hope that God is at work within us, shaping us toward greater likeness to Christ. In our small acts of devotion, in our honest confessions, in our deliberate choosing of simple, unseen ways to love, may we discover that grief and hope meet in the same holy ground: the merciful God who sees, forgives, and renews.

Let this season be a school of heart-sight, where we learn to mourn what is broken without surrendering to despair, and to hope in the God who makes all things new.

Let us Pray: God of mercy, as we begin this Lent, meet us in our grief and lift our eyes to your unfolding hope. Help us to seek you in secret, to do justice in humility, and to store our treasure in heaven where your kingdom endures.

Amen.