

## Sermon for March 5, 2025, Genesis 3:17-19, “From Dust to Dust”

### Introduction: Lent and Ash Wednesday

Starting today, we begin the season of Lent, one of the major seasons in the Christian calendar. The English word Lent derives from ancient English ‘**lencten**’, which means spring.

Days are getting longer during this season. During Lent, light is added each day. We journey toward full light.

The first day of Lent is known as Ash Wednesday. On this day, Christians participate in the tradition of marking their foreheads with ashes in the shape of a cross. But why do we put ashes on our foreheads? And how should we observe Lent?

### Body: Meaning of Ashes

In the Bible, covering oneself with ashes is a symbol of repentance. In Job 42:6, Job confesses, “**I repent in dust and ashes.**” Ashes remind us of our failures in following God’s Word and will, symbolizing our remorse for living according to our own desires.

The act of wearing ashes represents repentance for individual and communal sins. Ashes on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday symbolize our deep repentance for our sins and wrongdoings.

Ashes not only signify repentance but also **remind us of our finite nature as humans who cannot live without God.** During the Ash Wednesday service, Genesis 3:19 is often read: “**For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.**” These words remind us of our mortal condition as humans. We are reminded that we cannot save ourselves and that we cannot escape death.

Why do we place ashes in the shape of a cross on our foreheads instead of scattering them all over our bodies? They represent our being sealed in the name of Jesus. In the book of Revelation, there is a description of God’s people being sealed before the tribulation. Those who are sealed are protected. By sealing us with the cross on our foreheads, God is declaring that we belong to him and cannot be harmed. **The act of marking the cross on our foreheads signifies that we now belong to Jesus Christ, who died for us on the cross.** It is a confession that our sinful self has been crucified and that we now live with the resurrection life of Jesus.

The ashes used on Ash Wednesday are made from the palm branches used during Palm Sunday. **The palm branch is a symbol of victory.** The act of marking our foreheads with ashes made from palm branches reassures us of the victory we have in Jesus Christ. When we believe in Jesus as our Lord, his victory over sin, evil, and death becomes our victory.

### Conclusion: From Dust to Dust

Now let’s summarize today’s message. Our lives cannot be lived apart from God. We are created from dust and will return to dust. Apart from God, we are nothing but ashes and dust.

The ashes that symbolize repentance and contrition carry God’s desire to lead us back to him. When we repent, God forgives us. Just as the father gave his returning son new clothes, God renews us and accepts us as his children once again.

Let us remember God’s words in Genesis 3:19, “**For you are dust, and to dust you shall return,**” and respond with a heartfelt, “**Amen.**”