

You are going to die. Isn't that nice to hear? Well, maybe not, but it is the truth. A truth we remember each Ash Wednesday as ashes are placed on our forehead and we hear the words, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you will return." Life is short and it is precious.

You are dust
You are particles.

Or, more particularly...

You are Systems (limbic, nervous, circulatory, skeletal) made of cells (hundreds of billions of them and every day hundreds of millions die and hundreds of millions are created) made of molecules made of atoms made of protons, neutrons, electrons made of quarks and other subatomic particles and these particles are billions of years old.

And, more specifically than all of that, you're mostly space. You are the energy flowing between all of these things. You are an intricate relationship of energy

This is Why it's "draining" and feels like it "sucked the life right out of you" - maybe you did

The same things as other things

Why you say, "I just feel really connected to nature", it's like this has become a part of me

It probably has - molecules and atoms and subatomic particles are exchanged and shared, no one is really quite sure what all happens in the space between, something new emerges when we are gathered and when we exchange these things with one another.

You are dust
You are also so much more

Rob Bell - You are an exotic cocktail of dust and soul, spirit and bone

You are dust that is capable of receiving the authentic, deep, active, willing to suffer, unconditional love of God freely given again and again no matter how many times you tell yourself you don't deserve it, or how many times, by telling yourself how great you are, you forget that you need it.

You are dust that is capable of sharing this love with others by letting this energy of divine love flow through you. After all, you're a complex relationship of energy, so let this energy be your animating force.

You are a sinner

You are also more than your actions or inactions

You are a saint - but don't make your practice of your faith about you.

Sin and forgiveness

Death and resurrection happening in you all the time cells die and are reborn

Saint and sinner in you together

You are marked with a cross - the same cross with which you were marked in baptism. Baptism where you have died in Christ and have been raised to new life in Christ.

What then shall we fear? We know death, and it does not stop the eternal life and steadfast love of God. We know and will confess the truth of our sin, our mistakes, our imperfections, our brokenness because they are not what and who we are. You are beloved child of God.

Fearless. Beloved. Beautiful.

Pray boldly this Lent. Pray for God to reveal God's will so that you might join in the work God is already doing to reconcile the whole world. Pray for the world and the courage and knowledge to make it safer, cleaner, more peaceful and just. Pray for people - those you know and those you don't - that they might know they are fearfully and wonderfully made and fully loved by God.

Fast daringly this Lent. Fast from harmful and hurtful words and instead offer loving and kind words. Fast from empty complaints and begin with a posture of gratitude. Fast from always having to get a word in, and listen and spend more time in silence. Fast from something you think you cannot live without, and be filled with the life-giving presence of God. Fast from always having to "do" something and spend time being present where you are and with those near you.

Give outrageously this Lent. Spend more time in a conversation with a friend instead of rushing off to the next thing. Give to someone you wouldn't normally give to. Write a kind note to someone for no particular reason. Give your in-kind donations of cereal

plus a cash donation and an hour of your time to Helping Hands. Give to meet a need before anyone has even asked.

Pray, fast, and give. Not for a reward. But because these will fuel your life, connect you with God and one another, turn you back to the cross, remind you of the promises of your baptism. Pray, fast, and give not because it's all about you and how great you are; but because it's not all about you, it's about God and God's abundant and steadfast love for you and for the world.

Life is short. You are dust and you will return to dust.

God makes beautiful things out of dust - out of you.

No matter how messy the dust is, God enters into it - into you.

God transforms dust - transforms us - so that we have new and everlasting life and the ability to share that good news, share God's love, and share in God's mission of reconciling all things - after all, we're all the same stuff, and we're all one in Christ,

We're all dust, and God makes beautiful things out of the dust - out of us.

Blessing the Dust from Jan Richardson Circle of Grace
For Ash Wednesday

“All those days you felt like dust, like dirt
As if all you had to do was turn your face toward the wind
And be scattered to the four corners

Or swept away by the smallest breath
As insubstantial

Did you not know what the Holy One can do with dust?

This is the day we freely say we are scorched.

This is the hour we are marked
By what has made it through the burning

This is the moment we ask for the blessing
That lives within the ancient ashes
That makes its home inside the soil of this sacred earth

So let us be marked -- not for sorrow
And let us be marked -- not for shame
Let us be marked -- not for false humility OR for thinking we are less than we are

But for claiming
What God can do
Within the dust
Within the dirt
Within the stuff
Of which the world is made
And the stars that blaze in our bones
And the galaxies that spiral inside the smudge
We bear
Amen.