

Lent Day 1

Ash Wednesday

Wednesday March 1, 2017

Reading: Romans 1:1-7

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection

Grace and peace to you; in some ways this is just the traditional opening of Paul's letters and we blow by it like a 'to whom it may concern' address line. But there's nothing ordinary about these words, especially when we reflect on the context. Death.

Today is the first day of the season of Lent. Tonight at Northview we have a worship service during which we will receive the mark of ashes on our foreheads. This mark reminds us that we were made from the dust and we will return to the dust. We will die. All people will die. I enjoy the phrase, "Nobody gets out of life alive." We are mortal and we die. This would be a terrible word, except God has a gospel — good news — which he has promised beforehand.

This good news is regarding God's Son, Jesus, who was and is the Messiah, a member of Israel and God's own Son. He too died. He tasted death and would have been discounted as a failed revolutionary except that he didn't stay dead. Rather, he was raised from the dead by God, showing he was, in fact, God's own Son. The good news is that death has been defeated.

The good news doesn't stop there! God was not just demonstrating his power with one resurrection, but he was beginning the new age with a new people, so now we are called to belong to the Messiah — we are called into him, to be his holy people. And, if we belong to him then what is true of him is true of us, too. Death is not the end of our story. We too will be raised to new life. We, in fact, belong, in Christ, to the new age.

Therefore, we have received this *grace* — this gift — from God and we have been given this *peace* — through Jesus' death and resurrection — with God. This is only the beginning of the good news Paul has and of which lent reminds us. We are preparing to encounter all this on our journey through lent.

Prayer

Father, thank you for your grace and peace, they are truly good news. Let us live in the knowledge of death and the confidence of resurrection through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.