

## **Lent Day 1**

Ash Wednesday

Wednesday February 14, 2018

### **Reading:** John 1:1-34

<sup>29</sup> The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup> This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ <sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

<sup>32</sup> Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. <sup>33</sup> And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>34</sup> I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.”

### **Reflection**

Today, all over the world, many Christians will receive a smudge of ashes in the shape of a cross on their foreheads. As a pastor who performs with rite with a community of Jesus followers, I reflect every year on the strangeness of the event. We intentionally gather to remind ourselves that we will die — a word our culture tries to keep as far away from itself as possible. My job isn’t simply to perform the rite, it’s to answer the implicit question the community has: why? Why do we do this? What does it mean?

We’ll talk a bit more about what it means tonight as we participate in it, but for now let’s answer the question of why we do this strange thing. I believe the answer lies in the section of our reading that I’ve pasted above. We human beings are blind. As John gives his testimony he affirms that the saviour stands in their midst but he doesn’t know who. He is here but I don’t know him. So God raises up John with the strange ritual of water baptism as a means to reveal the saving one who stands in Israel’s midst unseen and unknown. And, through that ritual Jesus is revealed — “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

God never moves. It is us who move. God doesn’t leave us, ignore us, or give up on us. We leave him, ignore him, and give up on him. Yet somehow we keep believing that God is far from us. He’s not. He is God with us. But, we don’t see him. We are blind. He stands in our midst, but we are incapable of knowing it. So, we are given a strange ritual which helps to reveal to us the saviour standing in our midst. Ashes on our forehead are not magical, making visible the invisible. Rather, it is a ritual that stops our normal routine for even a moment so we can pay attention to the salvation that God has provide in Christ Jesus — the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. We see him because God has revealed him and he in turn reveals the Father who we have not seen.

### **Prayer**

Dear Jesus, you who gave sight to the blind, please open our eyes that we may see you and in seeing you we may see the Father who sent you. Reveal yourself to us as we seek to pay attention to your presence in our lives and your great grace which comes to us every day. Amen.