The Season of Lent Begins on February 14th,

Ash Wednesday

Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

So it begins!  Lent is a time of reflection and preparation for Easter.  Seems odd doesn't it that we prepare for the most exciting Christian observance by reveling in exactly the kind of life the Resurrection came to dispel?

Let me put it another way.  Imagine if, in building up to the excitement of the race at Talladega, NASCAR fans drove 15 miles an hour everywhere they went.  In prepping for a wedding, the bride wears black everywhere.  An entrepreneur, in coming into a large sum of cash, ceases spending.  Christians, in preparing for the greatest miracle... fast?  The very joyful event at the end of Lent (Easter!) seems like reason for a 40 day party; not a 40 day funeral.  For a lot of people that just wouldn't make sense.

That assessment of Lent is not really fair.  Lent isn't a really long funeral.  It is instead a celebration of life as we know it.  And to be accurate, Easter is a season of the Christian calendar that lasts until Pentecost.  So yeah, you get the huge party afterwards anyway.  The traditional statement associated with Ash Wednesday is "Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust" - a reminder of the frailty we all experience in life.  I always thought it was a bit harsh, you know?  "Hey man, you are dirt," isn't exactly uplifting.

But that is precisely the point.  Before we can appreciate the new life of Jesus Christ we must place it in stark contrast with what we know.  And what do we know?  Well just watch the news, listen to your neighbors, or check your bank account.  We know scarcity.  We know fear.  We know dashed hopes and brokenness.  We know ashes.

But before we go patting ourselves on the back for being so realistic or being so enamored with our suffering that we get prideful, read Matthew 6.  This reading should make us all wonder if we've missed the mark in our piety.  Even as we confront the difficulties Christ faced and our own shortcomings, we keep our journey between God and ourselves.  The true reward waiting at the end of Lent is not that our piety will be rewarded but that our ashes are precisely the material God will use to bring new life.  This season will help us look at our ashes in a whole new way.  Over this season listen for people sharing stories of the joy of Christ.  Remember the ashes that are the beginning for so many of these stories - and believe that Christ can do the same with yours.

A post by Rev. Jack Hinnen, United Methodist pastor on a blog site entitled *A United Method on 2-11-13*