

Message for Ash Wednesday, Year B (2/17/2021)

Usually, Ash Wednesday is an occasion to remember our own mortality. In any other year, we'd walk down the center aisle of the sanctuary and receive the sign of the cross on our foreheads to be reminded that we owe everything, to include our very lives, to God who is gracious and merciful. But especially this year, Ash Wednesday is also an occasion to remember the mortality of others, our loved ones, yes, those whose foreheads we may have the opportunity to mark with the sign of the cross tonight, but also the many strangers whose health and well-being we've honored all year with our sacrifices. It's been nearly twelve months of fasting from physical proximity to one another, a wearying yet persistent discipline of love.

What a privilege to commit ourselves to that discipline again tonight. To quote our Lenten devotional resource, *Fury and Grace*, Ash Wednesday is "a day of repentance, a day of turning."¹ Friends, in gratitude to God for turning toward us with persistent grace and mercy, let your Lenten practice this year be a turning again toward others in your heart, "a continuous process of waking up to the people around you," to borrow the words of pastor and author Mihee Kim-Kort. And in every season, let's "live as if we belong to each other... as if we need each other, because we do."²

¹ 3.² *Outside the Lines*, 58-9.