

## “New Creation” (2 Cor. 5:17-18)

Ash Wednesday (2/14/24)

*17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. (NRSVUE)*

Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. Ash Wednesday invites us to remember who we are as God’s beloved -- those whom God made from the dust of the ground. Ash Wednesday and the Lenten season also remind us that we are God’s new creation.

In today’s text, Paul shares one of the most important consequences of the death of Christ for all. That is, all who have died with Christ are now in him and have been made anew. Paul believes that God reconciles the world in Jesus Christ. Through his life, death, and resurrection, Christ has created God’s beloved anew. Paul said, “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!” It is God, not us, who makes the new creation, and we are grateful that this new creation took place in the death and resurrection of Christ, making us new people.

The most powerful ritual for our dying together with Jesus is baptism. Through baptism, we are incorporated by the Holy Spirit into “God’s new creation,” becoming part of the body of Christ. By baptism, we are immersed in the death of Christ, where our sins are buried, where the “old Adam” is crucified with Christ, and where the power of sin is broken. Fully identified with the death of Christ, we are buried with him and are raised here and now to a new life in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, confident that we will also ultimately be one with him in a resurrection like his (Rom. 6:3–11; Col. 2:13,3:1; Eph. 2:5-6).<sup>1</sup> In a nutshell, through baptism, we participate in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, becoming renewed to live out our lives as new creations.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Ash Wednesday invites us to boldly confront death, reminding us of our mortality, frailty, and the need for reconciliation with God. To many, this is an unpleasant dose of reality because we live in a culture that would rather avoid thinking and talking about death as much as possible. For Christians, Ash Wednesday is a blessed time of gratitude because it reminds us that with the

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<sup>1</sup> WCC, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*.

death of Christ, we are buried with him and are raised here and now to a new life, as new creations. Ash Wednesday also reminds us that “when we are living, it is in Christ Jesus, and when we are dying, it is in the Lord. Both in our living and in our dying, we belong to God. We belong to God.”

I will conclude today’s message by reading two short prayer-poems written by Steve Garnaas-Holmes, a retired New England UM pastor, and my friend.

### Ash Valentine

Not a box of chocolates  
or spray of roses,  
but ash smudged on your forehead:  
a reminder, dust,  
that you shall some day blow away.  
Dirt in the shape of a heart,  
dust in the form of a life—  
now, this life:  
given, but so briefly,  
like a breath,  
cherished, with such sweet hope.  
A Valentine from God’s own longing heart,  
both praise and plea:

*Love you to death.  
Won’t you be mine?*

The second one is Ash Wednesday prayer. I invite you to close your eyes and pray together in your mind.

### Ash Wednesday Prayer

Creator God, from stardust you have made us  
and from the dust of death you raise us.  
Your spirit alone breathes life in us.  
Create new hearts in us, O God,  
and put a new spirit within us,  
that we may repent of our sin, be made new,  
and live lives in harmony with your delight,  
through Jesus Christ, the Beloved. Amen.