

Sermon Ash Wednesday Year B 2018

We would all know the importance of regular health checks. They say prevention is always better than a cure. But sometimes we really just don't know what's ticking along quietly inside ourselves. We suffer a few aches and pains which are pretty normal, so we don't bother getting them checked out. Sleepless nights and headaches. Well, they're pretty normal too so we don't get them checked out. Flu symptoms which seem to coincide with practically every major illness, so we don't get them checked out. And so, if we're not careful, if just let things keep on slowly and gradually mounting up, if we don't take a regular and careful examination, we can be in more trouble than we hope to admit. We don't want to be the hypochondriac piling into the doctor's surgery for every sniffle and scratch. But we want to be aware of what our bodies are telling us. We do want to respond to those things which suggest things aren't really all as it should be.

The holy season of Lent, which we commence today on this Ash Wednesday, is the church's gift of an annual 'check up.' Some people don't bother with Lent - see it as all so terribly negative and all gloom and doom. But the people that ignore the opportunity that is given us in the season of grace are like those who - despite all the sleepless nights, headaches and aches and pains and flu symptoms - do nothing. For those who ignore these symptoms - and sometimes they *are* quite subtle and not obvious to anyone else - ignore them at their peril. So too for our life of faith. If we wish to maintain health and vitality in our life with God, then we need to be real about what's wrong, and be prepared to accept the remedy.

The greatest illness that afflicts human kind is alienation from God. Lent places before us - front and centre - the remedy to that affliction: the Cross. And so we approach Lent as a pilgrimage, as a journey to the Coors. We hold it before us as the destiny of our journey. And as we move closer toward it, it - on the one hand - shows up ever more clearly our alienation from God. But on the other hand, it works its healing power within us. Before the cross we see what we are before God, and who we truly are within ourselves. It shows us that we don't have the remedy within ourselves to cure ourselves. But it also shows that for those who dare to trust its power it is healing and life.

Lent invites us to take that living cross into our lives. The traditional disciplines of Lent - prayer, fasting and almsgiving - helps to work out the remedy in our lives that God gives us. In committing more intently to prayer we begin the cure of alienation from God. In committing more intently to fasting we begin the cure of alienation to ourselves. In committing more intently to almsgiving we begin the cure of alienation to the broken world around us. The true cure of the fullness of life God offers us in Christ is a *complete* one. It seeks to bring the disparate and fragmented parts of our lives into one, into wholeness, into completeness.

May we take the opportunity in this holy season of grace to be real with ourselves, to see what are before God, and to accept the gift his life giving and saving cross. Amen.