

Beloved Dust
Genesis 2:7
Psalm 8

Westminster Presbyterian Church
Pastor Doug Browne
February 14, 2018 (Ash Wednesday)

Genesis 2:7

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Psalm 8

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Part of my job as your pastor is to tell you truths that are not necessarily pleasant to hear.

But they remain truths.

God made us human beings out of dust, and we are still dust.

You are going to die. And so will every other person whom you know.

Your parents. Your siblings. Your friends. Your spouse. Your children. Your grandchildren, if any. You.

My parents. My siblings. My friends. My spouse. My children. My grandchildren, if any. Me.

We are born, we live, and we die. We may have improved somewhat on the Biblical three-score-years-and-ten, but the basic fact remains. The Psalmist says that, “As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.”¹

We live, and we die. From God’s perspective, this happens in the blink of an eye.

If this were the whole story, then the Nihilists would be right, and life would truly be, “a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing.”²

But it is not.

There are two truths that are linked here, truths that I told each of you when you came up to receive ashes. They are both completely true. You can’t claim one without the other.

You are going to die.

And you are loved.

When my late grandparents moved back to America after many years as missionaries in India, they had to label all their crates and boxes as to contents, so that the movers know what they were moving. The family remembers, even now, many years later, that the most important crate was clearly and prominently labelled, “Beloved Junk.”

¹ Psalm 103:15-16.

² William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene 5.

Nothing in that crate was worth much money. An insurance adjuster would likely have given them a few dollars for the whole crate. But what was in that crate was literally irreplaceable.

That is what we are, my brothers and sisters.

We are beloved dust.

Marvel at that for a moment.

We do not deserve for God to treat us as significant. In and of ourselves, we are not.

God does not need us. We need God, but God does not need us.

But God loves us so much, that Jesus came down here, was born, lived, died, and was resurrected, to bring the whole *cosmos* back to God. In our baptisms, we are baptized into his death and resurrection, so we will die, but we shall not perish from the earth. Because he was resurrected, we shall be resurrected like he was.

This evening, we start the season of Lent, when we contemplate these two aspects of our being as beloved dust. We will spend the next forty days preparing to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ for our sakes.

I encourage you to spend some extra time during these forty days praying and reading Scripture. Learn about and speak with the God who loves you that much. Strive to learn God's will, so that you can do God's will in the world in the time that you have.

As dust, that is what we can do in gratitude for God's amazing love.

AMEN.