

Sunday, September 1, 2019  
Rev. Jessica Paulsen  
FPC, Corning  
Genesis 2:4-9; 3:17-19  
1 Corinthians 15:35-58

*Dust in the Wind*

This week has actually been a little challenging, which is really surprising to me. Surprising, in that I love to look at texts (songs, hymns, books, poems—any sort of text) and discover meaning in them, especially religious or theological meaning. So, I figured, a sermon based off the text of the song *Dust in the Wind*, I can do this. But it was complicated by how I approached the song. For in the request that was made the person wrote, “When I was much younger a minister played that song and did his sermon based on that song. Basically, the gist of the sermon was that we are not just dust in the wind. There is a purpose and our lives make a difference. On a daily basis we affect others. I would love to hear a sermon based on that song.”

Alright, then. I might have a tough act to follow but I was intrigued by the request and was looking forward to seeing what would come when I listened to the song. So, I approached the song with all of this in mind, found it on Youtube, and listened to it, a few times, some just listening, not watching the video, and some doing both, watching and listening. And I listened to it some more.

In fact, to make this experience complete, we’re all going to listen to it now. So, everyone knows what song I’m referencing.

PLAY SONG VIDEO IN POWERPOINT PRESENTATION.

There it is. *Dust in the Wind*. And what ended up making this week challenging is that I came at this song, with this sermon request in mind, that we’re not just dust in the wind, and the sermon preached in worship may vary from this manuscript in scope, formulations, and content. This manuscript is intended for personal use only. Per my agreement with the Session, I retain all ownership and copyright of these works and ask that you not make copies or distribute them without my consent.

first thought that ran through my head after I was done listening to it was, “Yes, we are.” We are dust in the wind, and nothing does last forever. It will slip away, and no amount of money will buy us another moment. We are dust in the wind.

Well, shoot. Pretty sure that’s not where anyone is expecting this sermon to go. Let’s see if we can find something else. Listen some more. Hear again, “we are dust in the wind.” God, Spirit, this is not what I was looking for this week—didn’t need this challenge—may I please have a different message.

Listen to the song a few more times. Message doesn’t change, “we are dust.” Fine. Guess I better figure out how to present this to the people. Thanks a lot, God! And I sat there for a few days. In that tension between the messages of we are not just dust, what we do matters, and we are dust, all will crumble to the ground. And what I finally came to realize, is that instead of looking at it as if they were complete opposites, I could see them as a continuation of the same thing—that it’s not either/or but it’s both/and.

Now, I know what you’re probably thinking—Pastor Jessica has lost her mind—“we are dust” and “we are not dust” fit the very definition of complete opposites, how can they be the same?

First, let’s start where I started, “we are dust.” This idea comes from the very beginning of time, from Genesis, and the story of creation. We read, “...then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath life; and the man became a living being” (2:7). God literally made us from the dust of the ground. We are made of dust. We are dust. And after sin broke the relationship between humans and God, God told the man, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). There it is, in black and white,

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for all of us to see, we are dust and to dust we shall return. We are dust in the wind and what I've found this week, is that it is important for us to remember that fact. It's important for humans to remember that we were created from the dust and we will return to the dust.

Why is this important? Because it's something we so easily like to forget. We get focused on the importance of who we are as God's children, that we create a pedestal for ourselves in the world. We have God's Spirit in us. God gave us command over the earth. God gave us reason and intellect. We're not like all those other primitive creatures that are on this planet. Except, we are.

If I am dust, and when my physical body dies, it returns to the dust, then I am just like all the other creatures of the earth. I am a created being, a creature, just as the elephants, or lions, or bears, or dogs, or cats, or bats, are all creatures. I am a part of this creation we call earth—I was made from it and will die and become part of it once again. I have literally been and will be again, dust in the wind.

Now, I recognize that might be difficult for some of us to hear or to understand. It might be an idea that we're just not sure about. We're a creature—just like any other creature?!?!?! But it's an important piece of our faith to remember—our faith in the idea of God as Creator, our personal Creator—and if God is Creator then we are the created. Which also means we are intimately connected to everything else God creates. We all fit into the category of created by God. So, we are intimately connected to each other and to the rest of creation. In our affirmation of faith today we'll declare that we believe we share in the interdependence that binds together all of God's creation. We are bound to each other—to each other as humans but more importantly to each other as creatures on this planet, living alongside all of the other creatures.

As the quote in the bulletin today says, we are we plus our surroundings. We do not exist as who

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we are without all that is around us. And if we do not work to preserve our surroundings and all the creatures we are connected to, then we will not be able to preserve ourselves as creatures on this planet. So, yes, we are dust in the wind. We were created from dust. We live as creatures. And we return to the dust.

But here's the thing. We are not only dust, for we have been filled with the breath of God. We've been given the power of God's Spirit, to share God's love and grace with all the other creatures around us. Think for a moment about how powerful dust actually is. A little bit of it can irritate our eyes and make us pay attention. The wind and the dust together can create beauty in whirling patterns. Dust carries the germs that help our body build its immune system. If you think about it, we could actually spend a lot of time talking about dust.

So, being dust doesn't mean unimportant. As beings created by God, who we are and what we do matters. It impacts others just as dust has an impact on our lives. This is part of what Paul is emphasizing in his letter to the Corinthians as he talks about the first man (or the man of dust) and the second man (the man from heaven) and how we bear or will bear the images of both of them. We are people of dust, as Adam was, but we are also people of heaven, as Jesus was, for we have been cleansed and saved in and through Jesus.

We are children of God, claimed by God, for God's purpose and how we live our lives, how we go about each day, affects everyone around us. Which is how we reach a point of being able to say that we both are and at the same time are not dust in the wind.

So, it has to be both/and instead of either/or. No, we are not dust in the wind for we are filled with God's Spirit and given direction by God. But, still, at the exact same time, we are dust in the wind, and nothing we or dream or create, nothing we are, will last forever. For the only being that is eternal is God our Creator, Savior, and Sustainer. Amen.

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