

**“Not Very Romantic, But It Is the Greatest Love Story of All Time”**  
***“In this is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:10, Modern English Version)***

This year, Ash Wednesday (which begins the Season of Lent) is on Valentine’s Day – a day for love and romance in our culture. But Ash Wednesday doesn’t seem to have much to do with romance. In fact, Ash Wednesday reminds us that we are, by nature, ***“dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27, ESV)***. For you and I were conceived and born soiled with sin – separated from God. And ***“the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23, ESV)***. The loving relationship that the first human beings had with their Maker at the creation was destroyed by sin. And it was man’s fault.

Not a great love story on a day of romance. But it is the truth. For if we are going to understand our condition and predicament in this life, it’s crucial for us to understand who we are and how we got this way. Therefore, the One who made us, and knows us better than we know ourselves, tells us the truth. And it’s not necessarily the kind of message that we may expect from romance novels or mushy movies. It’s revealed in the Bible – starting with the story of the fall in Genesis 3. But see, in this story (already in Genesis 3:15) we are also told the greatest love story of all time wrapped in a promise from God Himself.

And the promise is that God would deliver His people who had rejected Him. He would seek them out and make them His bride. And God fulfilled that promise by sending His own Son into our world. This was revealed to us in the Christmas story. And throughout Epiphany we learned more about the identity of this One born to a virgin. For at His Baptism and at His Transfiguration the Father said, ***“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17, ESV; Matthew 17:5, ESV)***. And now throughout Lent we’ll journey with Jesus to the cross – for to suffer and die is why God’s Son took our human flesh and came into this world.

And Jesus bore the sins of the whole world upon that cross. He reconciled us with God. He sacrificed Himself for us. He became our substitute to receive the judgment that we deserve. He suffered Hell for us, died our death, and triumphantly rose again for us three days later. And through His Means of Grace, our risen God and Savior now gives us the forgiveness, salvation, and new & everlasting life that He earned for us.

What a love story. Jesus sought us out to make us His own bride – lovingly and valiantly rescuing poor and helpless sinners who are unable to save themselves. And there really is no greater love story – all other love stories truly do pale in comparison. For ***“in this is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*** For ***“greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13, ESV)***. And this is what Jesus has done for you and me.

See, God’s love for His bride, for His church, is not tawdry. God’s passion is centered in the cross. For the “passion” of the Lord that we reflect upon during Lent is different than the worldly or sensual passion that many associate with Valentine’s Day. In Acts 1:3, Luke wrote that Jesus ***“shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3, KJV)***. And the word interpreted here in the *King James Version* as “passion” is the Greek word “pathein” which means “suffering.”

My friends, the “passion” in Lent is all about the suffering and death of Jesus for our sins – which is the greatest act of love ever. And see, there is nothing wrong with celebrating Valentine’s Day. It can be special and fun. But Lent, which begins on Valentine’s Day this year, is the greatest love story of all time. It’s the story of the Gospel. And it’s a story that gives what it promises – namely, forgiveness, deliverance, and unending life with God. Therefore, it’s a story that we won’t want to miss out on this year. For who could ever grow tired of hearing how much God loves every human being? I certainly cannot. That is why we need God’s Good News every day of our lives as we journey through this world. And thanks be to God that Jesus, the One who loves us more deeply than we are able to fully comprehend, never grows tired of telling us His Gospel. For He never grows tired of telling us that He loves us unconditionally and wants us to be with Him forever in Heaven.

Blessed Lententide,  
Pastor

PS – As mentioned above, Lent begins on Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup>. As in past years, we will be having mid-week Lenten services on Wednesday evenings (starting at 7PM) throughout the Lenten Season. The services will alternate each Wednesday between the two congregations. This year we’ll begin at St. John’s, Hubbell. So, I hope to see you at St. John’s for our Ash Wednesday worship service on February 14<sup>th</sup>, starting at 7PM ~ Pastor.