

## SPIRITUALITY OF DEATH

I'm loathe to give you another commercial for an event at the church, but this one is relevant to the season.

You see, tonight we begin our Lenten program which is called "Remember That You Are Dust." This phrase comes from the Ash Wednesday liturgy; as we place ashes on the forehead, we say "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return."

It's a reminder that we all die and an encouragement to live like it.

The four-part series bears this title because Lent is all about pondering our mortality (and our attendant sinfulness). So we ponder death in all its facets.

Tonight's session is titled, "The Spirituality of Death" and focuses on why we die, why we fear it, and how we can live more fully.

Without wanting to give too much away, you might indeed ask yourself why we die.

If you have ever been touched by death, the I would bet you've asked that very question.

The reasons are manifold, and part of the answer will depend on what you believe about God. By that, I mean that those who believe in no God simply believe that it is a function of being a living, energy consuming and producing being. All things die.

Which, of course, is true. We may be able to prolong life for heretofore unheard of lengths (they say the first person to live to 200 has already been born), but eventually we all die. Still, we often rage against the injustice of it. The husband who sits by his dying wife's side wishes for more time. The parent who buries a child repeats the lament of every such parent: It's not supposed to be this way. The bystander who witnesses the sudden death of a stranger stands mute, able only to give voice to one word: Why?

Why indeed.

But why we die is not the most important question. The deeper question is whether or not death - and therefore life - has meaning beyond mere survival.

I would argue that the answer is yes. Going out on a limb, I would even argue that anyone who finds or looks for meaning in life and death is coming from a position of faith, which is trust in that which is not seen.

Coming from a position of faith, we can answer those three questions (why do we die, why do we fear death, and how can we live more fully) in turn. But I'm only going to touch on them here - we'll have a deeper discussion at the session.

We die because because we are not meant to stay here forever. No more than we are meant to stay in school forever. There's much more life out there, and life on earth is merely preparation - school, as it were.

We fear death because A) we're afraid of pain, B) it's pretty irrevocable - once you die, you're not coming back short of a miracle. C) We just don't know what it's like, and that's scary.

That leaves the question of how we live more fully now that we are armed with the knowledge of our death. The answer? Well, my answer.... understand that death is part of our life. It's our time clock - we don't know how much time is on it, but we know it's ticking. This gives us incentive to act quickly - to live each day as if it were our last, to learn what we're here to learn, to love as broadly and well as possible.

That's a start. If you want more, you have to come to St. James' Chapel this evening at 7:00 pm. All are welcome, and there's no admission fee.

For the record (so I don't keep bothering you with commercials for the next three weeks), the session on March 3 is "Legal Issues of Death" and is led by a lawyer. The session of March 9 is "Practical Matters of Death," led by Rob Sweet of Sweet's Funeral Home. And the March 16 session is "Plan Your Own Funeral" where each participant gets to, you guessed it, plan out their own funeral service. All of them are at 7:00 PM. The Chapel is at 10 East Market Street in Hyde Park.