

Polly's Pondering

*“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. This is He who was spoken through the prophet Isaiah”
Matthew 3:2-3a*

I was a young 22-year-old mother of one when I took the job as an Examiner in the home office of an insurance company. I was a bit overwhelmed when I discovered that all the other individuals in my position were lawyers, and I was the first female to hold the position. I learned a lot of things while becoming proficient at that job. Most of the things I learned were about the job, some things were about the people I worked with, and there were even things I learned about myself and my faith.

The secretary for the President of the company worked in the same area of the building as the four of us serving as Examiners. She had served in this position for years. She was kind, a bit quiet, and full of wisdom. I trusted her. One day upon arriving at work I noticed that she had a smudged mark on her forehead. To be helpful, (I consider this one of my strengths...but every now and then...) I reached up to wipe the smudge off her forehead. With a quickness that was unfamiliar from this gentle woman, her right hand reached up and halted my efforts just before I wiped the mark away. Polly I am surprised at you, you know it's Ash Wednesday. I instantly knew I had overstepped my ground. I didn't have the heart to tell her that I knew nothing about Ash Wednesday. I had raised myself in the Baptist church in which we never celebrated Ash Wednesday. And it was only after I had married, and we moved to Broken Arrow Oklahoma that we began worshiping at the local Methodist church.

I still remember the first time I knelt at the altar and had the pastor anoint me with the ashes of the previous year's Palm Sunday branches. It reminded me how easily I rejoice in the presence of God, and unfortunately how often I fall short of taking up his cross. But it never felt like condemnation, but more like conviction. Conviction that God's love is unearned, undeserved, and yet so freely given. Conviction that I fall short, mess up, forget to carry my cross and follow Christ, and yet that same cross reminds me that Christ came to redeem me from my very brokenness that seeks to separate me from God. That is when I realized that the ash smudged cross that I tried to wipe away from the secretary's forehead was her reminder that God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not die but have everlasting life. That cross was a witness to her belief in God's love that covered her sin and redeemed her for an eternal life that was already begun on earth.

I hope you will join us in the Activity Building on February 14 to celebrate the greatest act of love ever given to you and me. We will fellowship around the table with a soup supper at 6:00pm and finish with a brief and meaningful service where you too can experience the reminder of God's goodness as you receive a cross of ash upon your forehead.