

Time Well Spent - Ash Wednesday 2019

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Date: 06 March 2019

Preacher: Pastor Tom Kraft

- [0 : 0 0] Music Music Music Music Music Thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you.
- [2 : 5 7] Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. You don't have to go to service. You don't have to go to church. You don't have to deal with anything.
- [5 : 0 4] Just drive through. We'll catch you in the car. On your way you go. Because our lives have sped up. They seem to be going faster and faster and faster.
There's no room to breathe. No time for just living. And then Lent comes along.
And Lent is a time when we're supposed to take time. To just examine our lives. And our plans. For living.
Sometimes we make plans. And they work out well. And sometimes we make plans. And not so much. Anybody here ever been to Batavia?
Yeah. Along West Main Street in Batavia. If you drove into town 20, 30 years ago. You would have seen a little church. On the right hand side.
- [6 : 0 4] It was sort of an abandoned church. Nobody really was using it. It was just kind of empty. And Jackie and I had this idea. That we were going to take that little church. And make it our house. We would drive by it.
And every time we went by it. We'd say. We're going to buy that church someday. And we're going to make it our house. But we didn't. Anybody else have a plan like that?
You have these dreams. And you have these goals. And you have these expectations. And somehow they don't seem to work the way we expect them to. In this passage from Galatians.
We read about Paul. And he says to us. When God set me apart from my mother's womb. And called me by his grace. Was pleased. He revealed his son in me.
So that I might preach him among the Gentiles. God had a specific plan for Paul. And he has a specific plan for us. We are called for a purpose.
- [7 : 0 4] For a reason we exist. We don't just wander through this life aimlessly. God has a reason for each of us. Even if we don't see it or understand it. What's God's plan?

For your life. For my life. And how do we find out? You talk to young people. And they'll go talk to mentors. They'll go talk to their guidance counselors. They're told to check statistics.

And see where the best jobs are. And where they're going to make sure. That there'll be a job in the future. That'll pay well. Right? The problem is it never works out the way everybody plans. Because the statistics that say the jobs are there today.

Don't work the same 20 years from now. So everybody's going into nursing. And maybe in 20 years we won't need nurses. Because robots will take care of us. Right? I mean who knows? How do we know?

Well the first thing as Christians we should do. Is we should talk to God. Talk to God. Talk to God. So that we don't miss what God's saying.

[8 : 11] Because we're too much worried about what others say. Paul says my immediate response was not to consult any human being. Not because people are bad.

Because it's important more to talk to God. Churches are good. Schools are good. Even religion is good.

as a handmaiden to the revelation of God. But it's what God reveals to us that becomes the essential piece. The part that changes us.

In verse 11 Paul says, I want you to know brothers and sisters. That the gospel I preach is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any person. Nor was I taught it.

Rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. Sometimes people think that I'm an effective preacher. Anybody want to guess what my lowest grade in seminary was in?

[9 : 13] Preaching. I am not a good preacher. But God has given me something that did not come by human instruction.

God gave me an ability that only he can give. And ultimately the power of God comes from experiencing what God wants to reveal to us.

If we try to learn it from someone else. If we try to experience it through other people. What we end up with is a copy of a copy. When we can actually go and receive the main thing.

Paul says it wasn't revealed to me by someone else. But that he was changed from the inside out. Did you hear that? From the inside. Have you heard God?

Have you listened for God? When I was young I worked for a company called Chemlon Lawn Care. Alright. I always thought at the beginning years of my ministry that those were wasted years.

[10 : 22] That I should have been out, you know, being a pastor younger or something like that. But I learned a lot of things. I learned about business. I learned about customers. And I actually learned how to talk to God. And you know why? You walk across somebody's backyard like this.

For 12 hours a day. But nobody with you. Just you. Back and forth. Back and forth.

Back and forth. For 12 hours a day. Six days a week. You have plenty of time to talk to God.

And not only that, you even have time to do something more important. To listen. To listen to God. And so I heard from God.

And I knew what God wanted for my life. Have you experienced the living God? Have you heard God speaking to you? If we want serious answers from God, we need to invest serious time with God.

[11 : 27] That's what Lent teaches us. That's what the lesson of Lent is. To take some time seriously with God. Paul spent time with God. He went into the desert.

There's no distractions in the desert. That's why people went out to the desert to meet God. Because out in the desert, there's nothing there. How many of you have ever been to the desert? There's nothing there.

Boring. Even the American desert, which is relatively interesting compared to most deserts. You drive for hundreds of miles. Hundreds of miles.

Seeing. Seeing. Nothing. But dirt. So they go to the desert. Jesus went to the desert.

That's where he faced down his demons on that 40 days. Note the 40 days. Like the 40 days of Lent. Paul spent three years.

[12 : 28] Three years preparing. Before he started to preach. They say we should spend 10 minutes, an hour on every minute that we preach.

Well, that ain't going to happen. I don't have that many hours in a week. Can you imagine spending three years? Oh my gosh, what you would have inside you to share.

Three years he prepared. For God. Which, by the way, is the same amount of time the disciples walked with Jesus, isn't it? When was the last time you spent three years with Jesus?

Three months? Anybody? Three weeks. Three days. Three days. If we want to receive a serious message from God, we now need to invest serious time with God.

Can we get three hours? You're here tonight. I'm not going to beat up on you. Because there's a whole lot of empty seats that aren't, right? You chose the good portion tonight.

[13 : 37] Even in the midst of the... Never mind. You know what it is. See, we're too distracted by what we think we have to do with our lives.

The tyranny of the immediate is what I call it. The stuff we think that's so important that if we don't get it done today, somehow our life will fall apart.

And yet, by tomorrow, we won't even remember what it was. And by a year from now, it won't matter at all. But today, it just had us and controlled us.

And so we're too busy with life to hear why we're living. Why we are even here. Matthew 25 says, I tell you, don't worry about your life, what you eat or drink, or about your body, what you wear.

Is that life more than food and the body more than clothes? And yet, I guarantee you that if you were given three days, you wouldn't be able to sort through all your clothes.

[14 : 53] Right? Right? And how much food do we have in our cupboards when we open them up and say there's nothing here to eat? Because we're so distracted by this.

Even though we would say that we agree with that. Why is it more important than food or clothes? But we spend our time with it. Where's our desert?

Where do we go? Where do we go to get away? Years ago, I told you I went to Florida one time for two weeks and just talked to God for two weeks.

That was an amazing experience. Me and God on the beaches of Fort Lauderdale. You would say that Fort Lauderdale would be too distracting. But it wasn't because all I did was look at the ocean. When you look at the ocean, you don't see anything and you don't hear anything but water.

Years ago, we used to go to visit my mother-in-law. And for reasons I won't explain, I would take long walks. Long walks.

[15 : 56] And hear from God. Now I go down there to remodel bathrooms and things. You see how it gets all mixed up. First, talk to God.

Take a little time out of your busy schedule and talk to God. During these 40 days. And then talk to other people. Because sometimes it's hard to really discern what God's saying, even when we think we do understand what God is saying.

There was a farmer who was not doing very well. He planted his crops and they didn't grow very well. And so he finally, he turned to God and he said, God, you've got to tell me what to do.

Obviously, my life was a failure. And he saw up in the sky, PC. Preach Christ. I got it. So he went to seminary.

He spent his time, his effort, his money, his work. He became a pastor. And he was a miserable failure. He got to glory. And he says to God, God, I don't understand.

[17 : 09] You told me to preach Christ. I saw the PC up in the sky. And God said, I meant plant corn. Because even when we hear from God, sometimes we're not sure exactly what it means.

So we have what Martin Luther used to call the call from above and the confirmation from below. It's essential that we understand what God wants from us and we listen to God.

But then we have to have it confirmed by others and we talk to others to find out what we're about. Paul spent time with respected Christians. He went up to see Peter and James to check his beliefs and to make sure he wasn't somehow mistaken.

That's the reason we have a church. That's the reason we have other Christians. Because otherwise, sometimes we can get confused. Because the message isn't always so clear. What kind of animal is this?

How many think it's a duck? How many think it's a bunny? How many think it's both?

[18 : 17] And how many are going, oh, yeah. It's a bunny. And it's a duck. It's both. Sometimes we need other people to help us walk through these things and figure it out.

So that we can understand. But the power of our faith doesn't come just in the understanding. It comes in God touching our soul. Because Paul had tried religion.

He was really good at it. He tells you so. I was a better religion guy than anybody back then. And he became an enemy of God. In the process, he was actually persecuting Jesus himself.

Paul was smart. He knew his religion. But he hadn't been touched by God. Sometimes people say, well, we need to read the Bible.

The Bible is a wonderful book. This is a great book. But I don't believe in God because of the Bible. I believe in the Bible because of God.

[19 : 28] You follow? The only reason why I read this book and study this book and accept what it says is because what God has done in my heart. So we're transformed by God touching our soul.

Paul had his life transformed. Paul had his life transformed. And we need that transforming power of God. Because otherwise, we just gather together to do religious talk.

When what we really need is to gather together to do life-changing, transforming experiences of God. Ash Wednesday is a tradition.

Ash Wednesday is a tradition. It's a tradition of our religion.

It marks the beginning of Lent. Which means we're going to have a fish fry this Friday. We know that. Ash Wednesday comes. We get fish fries the next Friday, right?

[20 : 32] For seven weeks in a row. Ash Wednesday is more than the beginning of Lent. Ash Wednesday is about remembering what we're not.

Remembering what doesn't matter. Remembering what we should put aside and what we should hold on to. As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after thee, O Lord.

Lord, you know, if you take the water out of a person, you know what you end up with? A jar of dust.

I've seen it. Many times. It's about this big. A jar of dust. And if you take the breath of God out of our lives, what do we really have?

Genesis chapter 2 says to us, The Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils a breath of life. And then, and then, that person became a living being.

[21 : 47] God took us from dust. Which is all we really are. Until we receive the breath of God. And God wants us to remember that that's what matters.

Because aside from our connection in our souls to God, everything else is just dust. That little cute church out in the pasture that, you know, seemed like nobody was using, got to be more and more decrepit.

After a while, we look at it and think, I don't know if we want to do that anymore. And then one day we came by and it was gone.

Gone. Because the buildings that house what we call churches will someday all be dust. That's all they are in the first place. It's dust.

Tear these walls down. You'll have a lot of dust. It's all dust. The concrete in the floor is all dust. We glue it all together in our own ways, but in the end it's all dust.

[23 : 01] But what we do in the souls of people, that's forever. And what we do in our souls takes us from being dust to being something eternal that matters forever.

God's purpose is to make your life worth living. Take some time and Lent. Take some time and Lent.

And let God work in your life so that you can put the dust aside and focus on the things that matter the most and that God makes something incredibly beautiful out of you.

We need to remember exactly what Pastor Tom said. We are from dust and to dust we shall return.

Today you will come up down the center aisle and if you so choose, you can have a cross put on your head, which is made from ashes.

[24 : 12] And the ashes are made from the palms. On Palm Sunday, they're kept from year to year and they burn them and that's what the ashes come from.

It's a full circle. And if you don't want the ashes on your forehead, you prefer them on your hand, just put your hand out. God meets you right where you are.

Everybody is invited to remember, to remember how wonderful God is and that he takes dust and he blows in the life in us and he gives us his spirit.

We also are going to be receiving communion and it's a different way that we do it. We do, Tom says that on Ash Wednesday is the only time we use the little cups and we'll come up to the, you'll come and get your ashes here and then you're all invited to come up to the rails and you can kneel and receive communion that way.

So I'm going to go up here and I am going to do the prayer of thanksgiving over the ashes.

[25 : 24] Shall we pray?

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. Grant that these ashes may be a sign of our mortality and penance so that we may remember that only by your gracious gift are we given everlasting life through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen. Will you join me in the prayer of confession and the words are right there.

Shall we pray together in one voice? Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from the ways like lost sheep.

We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws.

[26 : 38] We have left undone those things which we ought to have done and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us.

Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou those who are penance and according by promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And grant, O merciful Father, for this sake that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life to the glory of thy holy name.

Amen. Hear the good news. Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. That proves God's love towards us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Glory to God. Jesus Christ invites all those who seek after him to come to the table. You're welcome to join us, no matter who you are, where you've been, what you've done, where you come from, or how long you've ever been a part of this church.

[27 : 52] This could be your first time here. You are welcome at the Lord's table because it's God's invitation that's offered to you. So you're welcome to come and join us this evening in Holy Communion.

The Lord be with you. And also with you. Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right to be our thanks to the grace.

It is right to the good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. You made all that is and made us to be your people.

When we withdrew from your love and became lost, you waited patiently until we return to you. For you are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

And so with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn. Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

[28 : 58] Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Holy are you and blessed is your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to grant us grace and faith, who went in the desert for 40 days to turn down the demons, who gave us the witness of how to prepare for you and gave us the meal to come and meet you.

And on the night in which he was betrayed, he took the bread. He gave thanks to God and he broke the bread. He gave it to his disciples and he said, Take and eat. Eat. This is my body, which is broken for you for the forgiveness of sin.

Eat of this, remembering me. When the supper was over, he took the cup. He gave thanks to God and he gave it to his disciples and he said, Drink from this, all of you.

This is my blood of the new covenant. It's poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin. Drink of this, remembering me. And so in remembrance of these mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. Pour out your Holy Spirit in us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and unpermented wine.

[30 : 21] Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. Behold, now is the acceptable time.

Behold, now is the day of salvation. By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at the heavenly banquet.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit and your Holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. Amen. Amen. And now as confident children of God, let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us in saying, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not to temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

[31 : 29] And now shall we join together in the prayer of preparation. As we say the words together, we do not presume to come to this table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies.

We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table, but thou art the same Lord, whose property is to always to have mercy.

Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to partake of this sacrament of thy Son, Jesus Christ, that we may walk in the newness of life, may grow into his likeness, and may evermore dwell in him and he in us.

Amen. And now I'd invite those who are helping to serve to come forward at this time, please. Now not to totally confuse people who have never been here before for this, what we do is we gather together and you'll receive the ashes and then you go to the rail.

We all gather at the rail and then I'll have you kneel if you wish. You may remain standing. And then you'll receive the bread and you'll get instructions to take the bread.

[32 : 41] And then you'll receive the cup and you'll receive instructions to take the cup. And then you'll receive instructions to go back to your seat. And the next group of people will come up to the rail.

So that's how we're going to try and do it. This used to be very simple because we did it every time, but now it's a little different, okay? Not to confuse anymore either, the gluten-free will be on this side of the church.

So if you're looking for gluten-free, you have to come over to this side of the church. I'm just kidding. And all the cups are all gluten-free. They're all grape juice.

So you're welcome at the table of the Lord. This is the body of our Lord, the bread of heaven, broken for you for the forgiveness of sins. Take and eat.

This is the blood of our Lord, the spirit of life, shed for you. Take and drink. Jesus said, I am the light of the world. You have come to the light of God. May the light of God go in you and dwell in you and be your power and your peace from this day into eternity.

[33 : 52] Arise and go in peace. May God, through the next 40 days, bless you, change you, transform you, and fill you.

May God touch you. May God cause you to take time aside and find a moment or two for the purpose of why you exist. May God bless you to live into that life and live into that purpose that God has given to you.

May God go with you now and keep you safe. No slip sliding away. Just safe, easy drive home. And may God bless you until we meet again. Go in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.