

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



March 6, 2022

## ASHES

*remembering we are dust*

by Drew Downs

Lent is a corrective season. It is the time we adopt the things we all know we *should* be doing already. But this doesn't simply apply to us individually *or behaviorally*.

The reminder we get on Ash Wednesday: to *remember* that we are merely dust and will one day return to the dust: is all about perspective. About *reestablishing* perspective when our egos get so inflated that we think and act and believe that we

are superhuman, permanent, and eternal entities. Or that the rules of creation don't *really* apply to us. Like when we pollute the world for profit - as if we don't all live here.

This reminder: that we are the same stuff as all of creation: is the emergency break for our out-of-control egos. That we can take what we want and do what we want, without consequence. The ashes remind us of *our* place as *part* of the cosmos.

# AFTER THE EPIPHANY

*Winter 2022*

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## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

When I was a kid, I loved Lent. Not because I'm super into penitence or the morbid curiosity of death. No, I loved Lent because it meant potlucks on Wednesday nights and potlucks always included KFC. So, while some people associate fried fish on Fridays with Lent, I associate fried chicken on Wednesdays.

While I think about this every year about this time, it hits me quite differently this year.

Most of us are missing the potlucks and the fellowship. Others the connection to study and commune. But not all of us are pining for it the same. And for many of us, those traditions weren't sustainable *before 2020*.

There are very real and *very open* questions about the future of fellowship and formation. And this Lent, you are invited to participate in *naming* and *sharing* these very real matters of life and faith today.

We will be having a Lenten Conversation that will involve independent study and personal and public conversations: online and in-person. Our source text is *We Shall Be Changed: Questions for the Post-Pandemic Church*. You are encouraged to read along, but it isn't required. We want you to join with us in exploring *what we are learning right now* and *what we want to not forget!*

Please join your neighbors in seeking a generous conversation full of renewed hope and grace toward each other. And may this Lenten season be a time of holy reflection and renewed life.

With love,  
Drew

# AFTER THE EPIPHANY

*Winter 2022*

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## FOR SUNDAY

*The First Sunday of Lent*

March 6, 2022

### **Collect**

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

From Luke 4:1-13

"When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time."

### **Reflection**

We refer to this week's reading as The Temptation, because that is what the devil is trying to do. He's trying to tempt Jesus into accepting what he is offering.

It is also clear that Jesus isn't really tempted. Like at all. Not even a little bit.

Which, in a sense, drains the story of its central conflict. It seems super exciting. And given the name we give it, super demanding. We imagine Jesus resisting and struggling with the wiles of the devil. *Maybe he'll break!* we think.

But that isn't anything close to what's happening here. Jesus simply bats it all away.

# AFTER THE EPIPHANY

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Which, I think, reveals something deep about us and what we think about this "temptation". In a real sense, calling it The Temptation is a misnomer, because there isn't any. It doesn't even seem true to say he is resisting temptation because he doesn't seem to be tempted in the slightest.

But the fact that **we** *would be tempted* remains abundantly true.

Similarly, Jesus seems to rest his confidence in Scripture. Which we might find ourselves doing the same...until the devil shows the way Scripture can conflict with itself. But that doesn't seem to confuse Jesus either.

Lastly, we may confuse Jesus's resistance for a rigid certainty of conviction, rather than the flexible understanding of belief.

This story isn't Jesus's Temptation in the Desert. It's ours. Because the devil keeps offering Jesus power, opportunity, certainty, understanding, pleasure, fame...all the things we worship and demand. An end to confusion. Clear communication and understanding of all things. Power to have our way. Controlling the response of others.

Time and again **we** are tempted by these things. And that is why it is so notable that *Jesus isn't!* It is remarkable that the *human* Jesus can resist what we struggle with over and over. But...it also proves that we don't *have* to struggle with it. The lust for power isn't inevitable.

I used to drink incredible amounts of Diet Coke. It is fair to say I was addicted. Then I gave up artificial sweeteners for Lent. Started drinking coffee with cream. Hated it for a week. By the end, I was drinking my coffee black. I now go days without a Diet Coke.

Lust for power isn't a permanent condition. It's an addiction. And we have ways of helping each other neutralize the craving itself.

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