

Ash Wednesday Service: February 17, 2021

“The Ashes of *Zamn*” Rev. Amir Tawadrous

Have you ever tried to be invited to draw an image of al-Zamn? Al-Zamn is a term and concept in Arabic language, simply meaning “Time.” But It is not a clock time that goes minute by minute, hour by hour, rather it is a descriptive term of time as a one Unit. The concept points out to the human experience over a certain period of time. So, have you been invited to draw an image or a picture that depicts your experience over certain period of time? Have you been invited to draw an image of Zamn before? what would it be, and what will it say to us?

I know that we shared different experiences in life, and certainly our images will be different from one person to another. I know that because once we complete our drawing, you and I will have to take one of two directions: first direction is that we will stand in front of the drawn image of Zamn, the image of our experience over last year, and we may desire to crush it, setting it on fire and turn it to Ashes. Or the second direction is that you and I may continue holding the images of our experiences and slowly walk toward the Baptismal font to wash the image with water and proclaim its redemption from all pain, suffer, loss, isolation, and loneliness.

One day, the community of God in the land of Judea were shocked by the locust plague that has swiped away everything green on the surface of the land. Weeping and crying is heard loud over their loss of so many lives and even families are Separated from each other. It is a pandemic that left people in agony. People. Then, the prophet stood up to draw an image of Zamn, and his image was full of darkness. In V.2., “A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!” A number of interpreters say that the prophet Joel was drawing his image based on the old experience of the Israelites leaving Egypt in the Book of Exodus while darkness surrounds them everywhere, with no knowledge when such a time will end. I am almost certain that many people didn’t want to hear Joel, but rather decided to set his image on image and turn it ashes. Yes, the prophet stand using his prophetic voice and pastoral skills to challenge all the people of Judea. The need is not to turn our experiences into ashes, the needs is to redeem our experiences at the baptismal font. The need is not to ignore the feelings of pain and fear; the real need to be grounded in the feelings and turn it to a holy, sacred ground where God will hold our hand and walk with us.

We used to celebrate the ash-Wednesday every year to remind ourselves of the need to be humble and prepare our service for Lent, but this year God calls us to more than just humbling ourselves, God calls us to stand beside the prophet Joel. As we continue to be struggling with the pandemic and fear around us, we are going to take it to where the holy spirit will wash all these experiences and bring it the full redemption of God. God is merciful and redeemer, God is love and just. This Ash-Wednesday service is a call for us to be more responsible and to re-set our priorities right based on what

God calls us. To be responsible for the nature that God has entrusted us to take care of it, and to set the priorities of creating good and healthy communications among members of the same family, the same community, and the same neighborhood.

*“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitant of the land Tremble,
For the Lord is coming, it is near.”*

That is the image that the prophet Joel wanted to leave with the community of Judea; it is that the Lord is near.. In 1 Corinthians, the new testament, the apostle Paul uses that say concept “Marana Tha” (Come, Lord, Come); the lord is near. It is an image of Justice and image of hope. It is an image of mercy and an image of love.

Brothers and Sisters, the Lord is near at every time we more from the burnt Ashes to the holy water. The lord is near when we humble ourselves and learn from the past. The lord is near when we attune our ears to God’s voice. The Lord of near, when we are grounded in a redemptive Zamn.

As we replace the use of ashes this year to the baptismal water, I invite you to ask yourself: Have you ever drawn an image of Zamn before? What area of our image that God will point it out to us?

The water is hear, the communion is hear....Come and bring your image of Zamn with you.

The Word of God to all people of God.

Thanks be to God.