



March 3, 2019

“Would you like to receive ashes today?”

There are just some stories worth retelling again and again. This one, by Rev. Jennifer Brownell, Pastor of First Congregational Church in Vancouver, Washington, will challenge and inspire you into Ash Wednesday...

"Is not this the fast I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?" - Isaiah 58:6-7

"Would you like to receive ashes today?" We asked one person after another. Our strategy was to ask them just as they exited the coffee shop, theorizing that people are generally more likely to say "yes" to something after they've gotten their coffee than before. Most said no, politely enough but firmly. A very few said "yes" immediately. And one asked, "Why? What is this?"

"We are from the United Church of Christ up the street," we explained. "Today is Ash Wednesday. On the first day of Lent, some Christians make a visible sign of repentance, which means to turn toward God. Would you like to receive ashes on your hand or forehead?" "Um, ok." And the person held out a hand, received a cross and a blessing and then walked away, a cross visible on the hand clutching the paper coffee cup.

After we heard about *Ashes to Go* on some website or other, our little church decided to try it – heading out in the streets during morning coffee rush and offering ashes to our neighbors.

When I told friends and colleagues about *Ashes to Go*, the reaction from quite a few was the same. "Oh my God, I would never do that." These are brave, justice-loving people I'm talking about. People who would never hesitate to clothe the naked, share bread with the hungry or bring the homeless indoors. All of those can seem easy compared to revealing ourselves to our kin, our neighbors, those people walking out of the coffee shop next door right now. And yet, God calls us to that fast, too.

- William P. Worley, PSE Conference Minister

Women's Week in the UCC

This week is recognized as Women's Week in the UCC. What woman has been instrumental in your life? I hope that each of you have a woman in your life that was/is as encouraging and loving as I have experienced.

I have been blessed to have strong women in my life. My grandmother was an amazing woman. I remember her like it was yesterday! She would stop whatever she was doing to spend time with me. There was a porch swing on the front of my grandparent's home. She would sit and swing with me for hours talking about whatever I wanted to talk about. Or answering any questions I asked, and I asked a lot of questions—still do. She would play badminton or just throw a baseball, whatever I wanted to do. I hold those memories to this day deep within my heart and soul. I still wear her bracelet from time to time when I need confidence and assurance. She was my rock, taken away much too soon from a stroke.

My mother, her daughter, was also an amazing woman. A woman caught between the changing of times. As a young woman, she worked at a drugstore downtown, but when she got married, she gave up any thoughts of being a career woman to become a stay-at-home mother. She kept things going at home on the small farm. My Dad was a rural mail carrier and left the house at 3 a.m. each morning. She was responsible for feeding the animals and chopping ice on the pond, so the animals had plenty of water on those very cold winter mornings. My mom had aspirations of something more, but she gave all of that up for my dad, brother and me. To the day she died, she was a strong woman who worked hard and did what she needed to do.

I'm so thankful to have had these women in my life. I'm so thankful to have had such amazing women as my role model. To this day I model my grandparenting from my grandmother.

Take time this week and call or visit with that woman in your life that has made you who you are. Take them out to lunch, or just for coffee. Maybe send them a card letting them know how important they have been in your life.

History has not always treated women well. There have been and still are places that do not value women in leadership, even the Church. The women who have gone before us have worked hard to pave the way for us today and I thank God for every one of them. I thank God for those women who were willing to forge the way into ministry for women. Because of their courage and their willingness to follow their calling, women in ministry benefit today.

I believe that God has created us all in the image of Godself. Each of us is a child of God. No matter where you are or what you do, let us as women make a difference wherever we may live and move and have our being.

-Rev. Sharon S Morris , Associate Conference Minister