

**ASH WEDNESDAY 2025**  
**Immanuel Highlands Episcopal Church**  
**Wilmington, Delaware**  
**March 5, 2025**

From time to time, we hear someone say something about being “grounded.” It may be a friend, maybe a spiritual guide, or reading something from any number of available self-help books and podcasts. Or, you could be talking to an electrician or an air traffic controller. Or your mom. Context matters.

The topic was raised at a recent clergy meeting. When I heard it and read some of the helpful description of the desired process, I thought “we already have what we need, and we’re getting ready to tell everyone about it again.” Those words? “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Ash Wednesday is one of those days where we remind ourselves that we are human, and like every other human being, save two or three mentioned in scripture, we will one day die. We get marked with a cross formed from the ashes of previous years’ palm fronds. We repeat words of confession and remorse. We promise to do better. Then we keep being human and try to defy death.

Let’s consider these familiar words, “remember that you are dust” in the context of “being grounded.” I wondered how scripture treats that word, grounded, so I did a quick check. It never occurs in one popular translation. In the NRSV, which we use most often, it appears once. Ephesians 3:17 tells us to be “rooted and grounded in love.”

Still curious, I checked to see what the Greek word is that’s translated as “grounded.” A translation of *tethemeliōmenoi* could be grounded, or it could mean firmly established, or also founded. What is not open for debate is the source of *tethemeliōmenoi*. It is *agape*, which the Apostle Paul, echoing Greek philosophy, says is the greatest form of love.

With all that in mind, hear again those words “remember that you are dust.” No doubt, whomever first penned (or quilled) those words into our liturgy for this day had in mind the creation story from Genesis. God formed the first humans out of the dust of the earth. And, when we stand at a graveside, we repeat those words along with some others--earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

The words we repeat today are part of that similar phrase, but they mean much more than simply reminding us that we will someday die. They serve as a reminder that we are created by God, who gave life to those first humans by breathing--giving God’s own Spirit--into them. And they mean another thing, one which we need to keep reminding ourselves. We don’t do that to ourselves. We are not God.

Now, I’ve said many times that it is a good and joyful thing that I’m not in charge of lightning. Mostly, that’s a good thing because I often find it difficult to do what we

believe God does for us today. I don't think I could keep accepting all of us who keep coming back, week after week, year after year, trusting that God's forgiveness is just as real and true as it was the first time we acknowledged our need for it. Created in God's image, created for good works? Yes. But allowing room at the very core of my being for those who keep denying that image, refusing to do that work? That seems to be a lot more difficult than saying "let there be light."

And yet, that is the love we're grounded in. It's the love for the very ground from which we are formed, and to which we shall return that not only allows us to keep coming back, but which welcomes us home with a feast that continues to amaze us by its offering us a place at the table.

So remember that you are dust. Remember this day and always that you are grounded, firmly established, that your very foundation is Love itself. We are loved so that we learn to love, giving away this wondrous mystery that we mark in ashes today, and which is marked at the very core of our own being as children of God.