

Reflection for the First Sunday in Lent-February 22, 2026

by Jennifer Irving

I have to admit something to you... even though I feel like I have been talking and thinking about Lent for the past couple of weeks, preparing myself for this special time leading up to Easter, these 40 days and nights (plus Sundays). A time to mirror Jesus' 40 days and nights in the wilderness—testing us, tempting us, ultimately bringing us closer to God and preparing us for Easter (at least that's the hope)—when Ash Wednesday arrived, all I felt was weighed down and totally unprepared. Even though I had picked out my Lenten disciplines—the fasts I choose.

My first fast is the same one I am encouraging us all to choose—to bring items each week to literally feed the hungry through our Little Food Cupboard ministry—today is granola bars (I hope you saw the basket at the back that will be there each week to collect items and be brought forward with the offering). A way of honouring God's will that we seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God. As a way of turning stone to the bread God's children need. I love it for so many reasons and I'm so glad that we are doing it together—a communal Lenten Discipline that even ties in with our Lenten Devotional that invites us into a spiritual practice of reflecting on food, hunger, and about what nourishes us. So, perfect. And yet...

So I also thought I would try the practice Nadia Bolz-Weber (an irreverent episcopalian priest – so irreverent that I have to euphemize the name she gave her Lenten discipline) She calls it a Lenten Discipline for Cranky People but I like to think of it as a Lenten discipline for tired people, struggling people, hurting people, worn out people, who just don't have the energy for rigorous Lenten practices this Lent. She encourages us to give up on the things that aren't helping us and take up what might.

She calls it the "40 Days of God "Stuff" Project". She plans to take a photo of something beautiful she notices in her day or write one sentence about a warm interaction with a stranger, or post something helpful someone said to her that day. Just in the hopes that it will "MAKE" her pay attention to the good. Only rules, it has to be something you experience first hand. Not something you read about online. She admits, the world will still be there—our lives too, with all their doom and gloom—this isn't a discipline to ignore that. But, she know that the beauty, the crocus through the snow, will also still be there—and she feels like "this is just not the year to miss the good "stuff"". Valid... And another great Lenten practice—feel free to join me on it. I kept a gratitude journal for Lent a few years ago and it fed my soul and I wanted that again. I feel like we all need to be re-oriented every once in awhile toward the good in the world—like Dewitt Jones "Celebrate What's Right with the World" And still, these first few days have just been such a struggle. Everything I go to share just seems so performative and I am already resenting the "one more thing I have to do everyday". Ugh... turns out I am cranky so you'd think this would be perfect for me. And yet...

Anybody else just feeling like this Lent is a bit like a muddy bog that we're going to have to wade our way through somehow rather than a welcome table? Anybody else feeling fragile? Like they are carrying the weight of the world already and don't need another drop added to the load? Anybody else just wanting someone else to do all the cooking so we can just come in and enjoy the feast? Anybody else wondering how much more of the heavy lifting can we do? Anybody found a Lenten Discipline that doesn't feel like too much? I'd love to hear about it!

I feel like I need something that doesn't start with a feeling that I am less than, like I have somehow already failed so I need to add something into my life to do better. Or something that I surely will fail because I'm only human after all. But I'm up against Lent's beginning—ashes on the forehead reminding us we are dust and to dust we shall return. I don't know about you, but this year in particular, I just can't handle the negativity. I need light, I need hope, I need help.

And what I kept thinking about was something I've heard in recent years about this sacred dust from which we are made and to which we shall return. Something I heard again in the Ash Wednesday blog of Cameron Trimble—who describes herself as a Pilot, an Author and a Faith Leader—and who guides individuals and institutions through times of profound change—and who I first encountered in 2019 at my first Regional Council meeting where she was the guest speaker. She writes:

In churches around the world, a minister dips a thumb into ash and marks a cross on a forehead, saying, "*Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*"

Many people hear that as diminishment, a reminder of smallness, fragility, mortality. But the church has always meant something more radical. You are not merely dust...

You are STARDUST.

Ash Wednesday does not humiliate the human being. It brings us back into right relationship.

Then she spoke of what that brought to mind in the light of the death of Jesse Jackson this week—you'll notice that I used his words for our Words to Ponder in our bulletin—and as we continue our celebration of black history month, I wanted to include these thoughts Cameron had about what really believing we are all stardust can do.

Journalist and professor, Dr. Stacey Patton, wrote that for Black children growing up in America, he was "*proof of possibility before we had the language to name it.*"¹ She remembered watching him stand in spaces never built for him and speak as though he had always belonged there.

That is an Ash Wednesday story. The ash says: you came from the same sacred ground as everyone else.

Jackson spent his life insisting that society must act like it. He did not argue belonging as sentiment. He enacted it as public truth.

When a nation tried to sort human worth into categories — worthy and disposable — he walked into rooms structured by exclusion and carried himself as though dignity were not granted by permission but rooted in creation itself...

Jesse Jackson understood that belonging is not polite inclusion. It is a claim about reality. To deny someone's dignity is not just political harm — it is theological error. It is a lie about what a human being is.

The ash tells the truth again: You are dust. But it is God-made dust. Therefore every person you meet carries the same holy material.

As we begin this Lenten journey, maybe being reminded of our sacredness, our original goodness, our holy belovedness will help us to let go of our cares and worries about what we can't do and embrace the grace and goodness of what we can.

I want to close my reflection today by sharing another author who speaks of the goodness of dust as we enter this Lenten Season and take up the fasts we choose.

This is Jan Richardson's "Blessing the Dust ~ for Ash Wednesday" from her book, 'Circle of Grace'. May we feel it's blessing for each of us on our Lenten Journey.

All those days
you felt like dust,
like dirt,
as if all you had to do
was turn your face
toward the wind
and be scattered
to the four corners

or swept away
by the smallest breath
as insubstantial –

did you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?

This is the day
we freely say
we are scorched.

This is the hour
we are marked
by what has made it
through the burning.

This is the moment
we ask for the blessing
that lives within
the ancient ashes,
that makes its home
inside the soil of
this sacred earth.

So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.
Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less
than we are

but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,
within the dirt
within the stuff
of which the world
is made
and the stars that blaze
in our bones
and the galaxies that spiral
inside the smudge
we bear.