

A reading from the 58th chapter of the book of the Prophet Isaiah verses 1-12

“Shout for all you are worth, raise your voice like a trumpet!
Proclaim to the people their faults, tell the house of Leah and Rachel and Jacob their sins!
They seek me daily, they long to know my ways, like a nation that wants to act with integrity and not ignore the Law of God.
They ask me for laws that are just, they long for God to draw near.
Yet they say, ‘Why should we fast if you never see it?
Why do penance if you never notice?’
Because when you fast, it’s business as usual, and you oppress all your workers!
Because when you fast, you quarrel and fight and strike the poor with your fist!
Fasting like yours today will never make your voice heard on high!
Is that the sort of fast that pleases me—a day when people humiliate themselves, hanging their heads like a reed, lying down on sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call fasting, a day acceptable to YAHWEH?
On the contrary!
This is the sort of fast that pleases me:
Remove the chains of injustice!
Undo the ropes of the yoke!”
Let those who are oppressed go free, and break every yoke you encounter!
Share your bread with those who are hungry, and shelter homeless poor people!
Clothe those who are naked, and don’t hide from the needs of your own flesh and blood!
Do this, and your light will shine like the dawn—and your healing will break forth like lightning!
Your integrity will go before you, and the glory of YAHWEH will be your rearguard.
Cry, and YAHWEH will answer; call, and god will say, “I AM here—provided you remove from your midst all oppression, finger pointing, and malicious talk!
If you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your shadows will become like noon.
YAHWEH will always guide you, giving relief in desert places.
God will give strength to your bones and you will be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters never run dry.
You will rebuild the ancient ruins, and build upon age-old foundations.
You will be called the Repairer of Broken Walls and Restorer of Ruined Neighbourhoods.”

The Star Within' - A creation story by Dr. Paula Lehman & Rev. Sarah Griffith

In the beginning, the energy of silence rested over an infinite horizon of pure nothingness.

The silence lasted for billions of years, stretching across aeons that the human mind cannot even remotely comprehend.

Out of the silence arose the first ripples of sound, vibrations of pure energy that ruptured the tranquil stillness as a single point of raw potential, bearing all matter, all dimension, all energy, and all time: exploding like a massive fireball.

It was the greatest explosion of all time!

An irruption of infinite energy danced into being. It had a wild and joyful freedom about it, and like a dance it was richly endowed with coherence, elegance, and creativity.

The universe continued to expand and cool until the first atoms came into being. The force of gravity joined the cosmic dance; atoms clustered into primordial galaxies.

Giant clouds of hydrogen and helium gases gathered into condensed masses, giving birth to stars!

Generations of stars were born and died, born and died, and then our own star system, the solar system, was formed from a huge cloud of interstellar dust, enriched by the gifts of all those ancestral stars.

Planet Earth condensed out of a cloud that was rich in a diversity of elements. Each atom of carbon, oxygen, silicon, calcium, and sodium had been given during the explosive death of ancient stars. These elements, this stuff of stars, included all the chemical elements necessary for the evolution of carbon-based life.

With the appearance of the first bacteria, the cosmic dance reached a more complex level of integration.

Molecules clustered together to form living cells!

Later came the algae, and then fish began to inhabit the waters!

Thence the journey of life on land and in the sky. Insects, amphibians, birds, reptiles, and mammals: all flourished and diversified and elaborated the themes of life. And now it is our time, too.

This is our story.

The story of our beginning, our cosmology.

And so we commence our Lenten Journey this night - this Ash Wednesday, with open hearts in the midst of our Creator.

As we partake in our daily things of life may we see them as sacred.

May we be empowered to perform simple acts of concern and love, and real works of reform and renewal.

Let us love deeply the earth which gives us air to breathe, water to drink, and food to sustain us.

May we remember that life is begotten from stardust, radiant in light and heat.

We are all one - all of creation, all that now live, all that have ever lived.

Remember we are stardust, and to stardust we return.

Remember we are part of the great mystery.

Remember we are stardust and to stardust we return.

Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

Jesus said:

“Beware of practicing your piety before others to attract their attention; if you do this, you will have no reward from your Abba God in heaven.

When you do acts of charity, for example, don't have it trumpeted before you; that is what hypocrites do in the synagogues and the streets, that they may be praised by others.

The truth is, they've already received their reward in full.

But when you do acts of charity, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; your good deeds must be done in secret, and your Abba God—who sees all that is done in secret—will repay you.

And when you pray, don't behave like the hypocrites; they love to pray standing up in the synagogues and on street corners for people to see them.

The truth is, they have received their reward in full.

But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to God who is in the secret place, and you Abba God—who sees all that is done in secret—will reward you.

And when you fast, don't look depressed like the hypocrites.

They deliberately neglect their appearance to let everyone know that they are fasting.

The truth is, they have already received their reward.

But when you fast, brush your hair and wash your face.

Don't let anyone know you're fasting except your Abba God, who sees all that is done in secret.

And Abba God who sees everything that is done in secret—will reward you.