

## A message for the beginning of Lent 2017

Pastor Kevin

One of my spiritual directors once said to me, Kevin, if you experience God's love as something similar to love you have felt from other people, it is most likely a projection or memory...it is probably not God. Well, *that* was certainly disconcerting!

We often describe God's love as being like that of a parent, like that of a loving mother or father. That is a source of great comfort for those of us that had loving parents, and perhaps not very helpful to those that had more challenging parents. That's the value of loving and being loved by others as we grow up. We find wholeness in the Beloved Community.



But God is not a human being; God is infinitely larger than that. After all, God is the creator of the cosmos, all the stars and planets that orbit them, including the planets that were newly discovered last week, orbiting another sun, 40 light years away. God also created the earth and all its creatures, including you and me; and loves all aspects of God's creation.

You and I exist in the *substance* of all that is God, we are inherently part of God. We may sometimes feel disconnected from God, but this is an illusion. We exist, in psychological terms, in the heart of God, not the toe or fingertip of God, but the very heart of God.

This is the value of praying into silence, which is our theme for this Lenten season. To pray into silence is to stand on the ridge of a cliff and call out to God; or to run along a rocky shore, to weep aloud or even yell into the thunder of crashing waves. It may feel like our voices are lost in the emptiness.



But that doesn't mean that God is not there. It just means that our voices are *small* in the vastness of God. It doesn't mean that our voices are unimportant. Scripture tells us that even before a word is formed on our lips, God has heard and cared for our thoughts. God knows everything that is on our hearts, minds, and souls – and *loves* us tenderly. Our faith teaches us this, even when there may not be a visible sign or emotion that we feel from the vastness of God.



Ashes remind us of our mortality. This is very relevant to me today, because my last remaining uncle died early one morning this week and was received into God's open arms. I realized my generation will be next. All of us will perish and return to God. Ashes are also an outward sign of the inner decision to change our ways so that we are in better relationship with God, other people and all life. Ashes mark the start of a journey towards resurrection. They symbolize letting go of anything in our lives that stands between us and God. When we are quiet, each of us knows ways in which our lives could be changed for the better. We just need to repent, to turn in the right direction and start walking. That's what we will do this

Lenten season, as a community of faith and people in covenant with one another. Amen.