

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Quincy, IL  
Rev. Martin Eden

Ash Wednesday  
Wednesday, February 18, 2026, at 7:00 p.m.

# **“Love Beyond All Thought and Fantasy”**

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

As we begin this Lenten journey, we do so through the lens of the love of God, which is ours through Christ Jesus, our Lord. We will be looking at the hymn “O Love, How Deep” as an aid to help us reflect upon what the love of God really is, and how it is that we can grab hold of such a big and amazing thing, and how the Almighty, Eternal God did all of this “for us” – which is the theme of this sermon series.

Part of the challenge with self-examination is that we do so always looking at and considering our own sin and unworthiness. Every time you set yourself up in comparison with Jesus, you will lose.

In the Gospel for today, Jesus exhorts the disciples and the gathered crowds not to practice their righteousness in front of others. “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,” He says (Mt. 6:3). Furthermore, don’t let your prayers become an excuse to show off how good of a Christian you are.

It's human nature, though, isn't it? I want to get credit for all the work that I do. How can I get credit if no one knows about it? So, when I do something that I think of as good work, what I want is some acknowledgment. Okay, maybe not a parade, but at least some recognition that I've done a good thing.

Yet, this Ash Wednesday, we remember our works, the parade of righteousness. Apart from Christ, none of those works are good. All of them are done in sinful incompleteness, and there is no righteousness to be paraded around.

Here at Our Redeemer, we do not practice the imposition of ashes. I just never have. We have a 7:00 PM service. Everyone would just leave church, go home, wash your face and get ready for bed. I find receiving the body and blood of Christ to be more meaningful.

However, the words spoken as the ashes are applied are powerful: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (LSB Altar Book, p. 483). It is as if the pastor is saying, "When you remember your good works, your parade of righteousness, also remember you are still going to die, so what good are your good works really?"

But then the hymn goes on to say that Jesus took on “our mortal form for mortals’ sake.” That means Jesus knows your mortality. He knows you are going to die because of your sin. We all will, unless He returns first.

The love of God is not a math equation. It isn’t just something we can act like we understand. I love sunsets, so obviously I understand the love of God. Not quite.

No, the love of God is higher, broader, and deeper than we can ever imagine. It is, as the hymn says, “beyond all thought and fantasy.” The love of God is the very thing behind the word “mystery.” A mystery is not the same as a puzzle. With a puzzle, you figure it out, and then you are done. But with a mystery, the more you come to understand, the more aware you are that you know nothing. The Latin word for “mystery” is sacramentum – from which we get the word “sacrament.”

The mystery of the love of God penetrates to the very heart of the Christian faith. It is what makes Christianity different from every other religion or belief. It is what shapes us as a people. It is what inspires us and moves us forward.

But love is not something to be understood. Not really. No, love is a gift that is ever growing, ever changing. Why? Because the love of God is always moving toward you, even though you are a poor, miserable sinner.

If we run around, parade our good works, and try to convince both the world and our own hearts that we are worthy of God's love, we are just running in circles. No number of prayers, no fasting or outward acts of piety will ever bring you closer to God. You need a go-between. You need a bridge. You need a mediator who will bear your grief and carry your sin. In a word, you need Jesus.

So the season of Lent is upon us and the call to repent of our sins rings out more intensely for the next six weeks. It is not just tonight on Ash Wednesday that we are to remind ourselves that we are dust and to dust we shall return. The wages of sin is death, as St. Paul says. It is what we deserve.

But God, who is rich in mercy, sent His Son, Jesus, to the cross to die for us, for our sins and rise again so that we may have life. It is a mystery beyond all comprehension. It is a treasure beyond price. It is a gift that can only come by grace.

Today, we come to the Lord's Table. Here, in the mystery of the Sacrament, you will not eat the dust of the earth but His very body and blood. Here we are drawn into the very life of God for us. It is indeed a mystery that is "beyond all thought and fantasy," as the hymn writer says. God takes on your mortal form so that you may live. And in exchange, He gives you His life, His works, His very body and blood. He does this all for us. Amen.