

The Rev. Steve Best  
St. Thomas Church  
Ash Wed. 2.26.20  
Joel 2:1-2; 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 5:20b-  
6:10; Matt. 6:1-6, 16-21

## **When the Trumpet Blows**

Welcome to Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent, a season of forty days. Tonight, you and I are invited to reflect upon the condition of our interior landscapes, examine the truths about ourselves and our relationships with God and all of creation and ultimately, take active steps to say “yes” to preparing for the new possibilities and opportunities that await us at Easter.

Embedded in the readings and rituals of this evening is the arrival of hope for change and transformation delivered by a loving God who seeks to wake us up from our spiritual slumbers. And we all know, God has a myriad of ways he can do this! Sometimes it is a close brush with death and mortality. Other times it the clearing of spiritual clouds after intense prayer. Sometimes it is the arrival of a paradigm shift brought about by a birth of a child or the beginning of new job, career, marriage, move, or unexpected inheritance. Basically, it is anything that has the capacity of rattling you to your core, grabbing your attention and reminding you that you have choices, often profound ones, about how you are to live your life.

One of my favorite stories of being rattled to the core is from my adolescence. I remember, soon after I could drive, I wanted to the freedom to change my weekend curfew which had been 11 pm. My father was of the school that only dangerous temptations were waiting for his son after that hour and nothing else—he was usually right! So, much to my surprise, I was floored when he said, “Son, I don’t care how late you are. Just use good judgment and be safe.” So, as you can imagine I ran for the door as fast as I could and my last words from my

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father were, “and don’t forget you promised to do your chores tomorrow starting at 7 am.” To which I said, under my breath, “yeah, right, Dad.”

And so 7 am did arrive the next day but not as one would have expected. My Dad tried the soft approach with no success. So, in he came with his old, tarnished trumpet and played reveille at the top of his lungs. Almost instantly I was not only fully awake, but I was so startled that I rolled out of the bed and landed on the floor. Later, we learned that everyone of our neighbors next door had also been awakened—all 7 of them!

There is no doubt that there have been numerous times in my life when the “still small voice of God” was not enough to get my attention especially regarding how I am to use my freedoms, privileges, and opportunities for the glory of God. Apparently, I am not alone. Trumpets have played a major role throughout the bible (there are 64 verses that explicitly mention them). Some were made of precious metals such as silver and others from rams’ horns. Their uses were varied: from priests announcing the approach of sacred festivals, preparation for battle, celebrations of victories, the arrival of dignitaries, and especially, Jesus’ second coming as foretold in the Book of Revelation.

What do these all these uses of trumpets have in common? A sense of urgency, a sense that something is so important that it can no longer be put off, postponed, or ignored. The sound of trumpets figures prominently in two of tonight’s readings. The readings from Joel and Matthew attempt to differentiate between when a trumpet is being used for a holy purpose (such as the prophet Joel calling his people to repent and return to God) and when the trumpet is being blown for a vain and worldly purpose (such as in the case of the hypocrites making a showy donation to the temple treasury). It’s often hard to know which is which as so often our motivations are a mixture of both.

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Has anyone noticed how much trumpet blowing and setting off of alarms is happening in our society these days?

Presidential candidates angrily trumpeting their highly polarized positions.

Financial forecasters loudly advising their clients in light of a spiraling downward stock market.

Environmentalists ringing alarms regarding rapidly melting polar ice.

Loud warnings from healthcare professionals regarding the spread of the coronavirus.

With so many trumpets a blazing it's so hard to hear God's trumpet above such a din but tonight we are offered some help.

Tonight, we will be given our ashes and when we hear those jarring and often rattling words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" we are brought back to urgency. Often in our Ash Wednesday observance we don't dig deep down enough to unearth the source of those ashes—the spiritual coals that keep us re-ignited and reunited with God's love, purpose, and direction in our lives. Deeper than our sense of mortality. Deeper than our sense of sorrow for having sinned and for all that has gone wrong in this world is the flame of God that refuses to burn out or be blown out by the forces of evil and destruction in this world.

The ashes we are to receive tonight come from last years palm branches burned and blessed for a new and life-giving purpose. May the fire of God's love always burn brightly, calling us to dig through the ashes in our lives until we experience the passion of God's love that always

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desires to help create something new within us—new hearts, new lives, new directions, new ministries. Surely this is when God's trumpet will most loudly blow. Clearly this will be when God's trumpet will be heard in our land. Amen.