



## Reflection for Ash Wednesday February 17, 2021

*For where you treasure is, there your heart will be also. [Matthew 6:21]*

As I have been preparing for Lent this year, I have returned to these words by Howard Thurman, the great African-American religious and spiritual leader:

*There is in every person an inward sea, and in that sea there is an island and on that island there is an altar and standing guard before that altar is the “angel with the flaming sword.” Nothing can get by that angel to be placed upon that altar unless it has the mark of your inner authority. Nothing passes “the angel with the flaming sword” to be placed upon your altar unless it be a part of “the fluid area of your consent.” This is your crucial link with the Eternal.*

Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart*, p. 15

Thurman reminds us that during Lent we are called to the altar that is our “crucial link with the Eternal.”

We are called to walk through the clutter of our lives

past our discarded resolutions and alluring diversions

past our hunger and longing

past our world-weariness and fear and cynicism

to stand before the angel standing guard before that altar,

in confidence and humility

and pay attention to what we offer on the altar.

***For where you treasure is, there your heart will be also. [Matthew 6:21]***

Typically, we begin Lent by asking ourselves, “What should I give up?” “What shall I *deny myself*?”

This year, I invite you to ask a new question. I invite you to ask “What do I love to do?” When do I feel most alive? Most confident about the path ahead? Most deeply connected to other people? For it is in doing what we love that we are closest to God. Then the next question is, “How do I make room or time for what I love to do? How do I make room for life-giving relationships? What do I need to discard so that my heart and soul can grow? What is it that I offer at the altar on the island in our inward sea?”

Lent this year is unlike most other years because it marks the end of a year of fasting. A year of solitude and isolation. A year when it feels like we have been deprived of what gives us deepest joy: Time with friends and family. Hugs. Coming and going as we wish. The sense that our time is productive and that our work matters. Perhaps this year, more than any other year, it is important to remember that our task is not to get God to love us—to please God. Our task is to re-discover that God *already* loves us even with all the unlovely and unlovable part of ourselves that we have confronted this year.

This year, let us give ourselves permission to do what we love to do, to welcome the longing that fills our hearts—the longing that is the source of all beauty, all love, all hope. This year, we give ourselves permission to do what we love to do. Let us promise to walk fearlessly and humbly to the altar on the island in our inward sea, allowing ourselves to be surprised by what we find there to offer.