

## “Authenticity”

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Richard C. Allen

South Glastonbury

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Connecticut

The Bible passage for Ash Wednesday is from The Sermon on the Mount. In these precious verses, Jesus is calling for authenticity. What the church needs, what the world needs is individuals who choose to accept and to be their authentic selves.

In this matter of authenticity, Jesus is our primary role model. He knows who he is. He doesn't try to be Moses or Elijah or Esther or Ruth. He knows what he believes and lives what he believes regardless of the consequences. He stands up for what he knows to be true. He is, in the best sense of the word, a spiritual role model.

So, one way to understand the meaning of Lent is to think of these forty days as a journey toward authenticity. Jesus found that being his authentic self got him into some trouble, cost him some of his popularity, some would say, 'led him to the cross.' But he also found it the best way to be free, the best way to be in relationship with God.

During these forty days of Lent, the question is: what do I need to do to be a more authentic human being within my family, within my church, within my community? What would I have to do in order to get a phone call from one of my children saying, "Dad, I see you're becoming more of your authentic self?" I have really be wrestling with this question. And here's what I think. I think that at the core of my being there is something we call 'hospitality.' So, to be more of my authentic self is to participate more in the ministry of hospitality.

I think this is why I love coming to church at 7:00 a.m. Sunday mornings to start the coffee percolating. I think this is why I try to be the first one to reach the coffee hour after the 10:30 service and the last one to leave. I think this is why I enjoy meeting people at So G's or at Day Break or any old place to break bread together. It's why, when I'm doing the words with children, I try to get right down to their level, make eye to eye contact, help them to feel welcome here. Yet, I know I am not always true to myself, not always welcoming. So, for me, the Lenten journey means becoming much more conscious of how to be a presence of hospitality.

In a way, Jesus is my role model when it comes to living into this value. I think of him with his mother and his disciples at the wedding in Cana. The wine had run out and the bride and groom faced embarrassment. Mary elbows her son and urges him to step up, to do something about it, to embrace the part of him that is hospitality. And he resisted at first. "Oh Mother! Not now!" But she persisted. In essence, Mary said to Jesus, "This is the time for you to be your authentic self." And, as we know, he rose to the occasion and chose to be his hospitable self, changing water into the best wine anyone had ever tasted.

Sisters and brothers, we all need to do our own wrestling. What would it mean for each of us to become more of our authentic self? When we wrestle with that question, we are entering the realm of hope. Amen.