

Joel 2:12-19
“Deity, Dust, and Dirt”
4th Sunday of Easter

April 26, 2015
Our Redeemer
Rev. Brent Hartwig

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen! Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

[*Made of Dirt*] God made you out of dust and dirt.

It is easy to see and know it after a body, like one of ours, dies and decays,
though you can get the general idea with a dead raccoon
that’s been left on the side of the road too long.

The fact remains that all of your complex DNA, cell structure,
the intricacies and wonders of your immune system and brain activity
is a miraculous transformation of dirt.

God created and God altered the properties of clay and mud
to become soft tissue and hard bones.

You are, in a most literal way, a clay figure that moves and thinks and feels.

[*Dirt does Dirt*]

This clay structure—all of us from the Adam who was made from that pile of Eden soil—
remains human flesh as long as God preserves it.

Without blood,
without the life in the blood sustaining each cell,
the body quickly returns to that dirt.

That’s why a dead body, left to itself, left to what nature does on its own,
deteriorates even more quickly after it dies.

Within hours, rigor mortis sets in.
What was soft skin and organ tissue hardens, decays, and rots.
What God brought out of the earth and gave his breath of life into (Gen 2:7)
returns to the earth (Gen 3:19).

But today you hear the prophet Joel:

“With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning” (Joel 2:12)
—that’s how we’d all assemble here if we actually thought
God was speaking those words to us.

We’d look and act differently, and not just for effect.
We’d see it in each other’s faces, if we even had the courage to look up, that is.

This day would be a day of humiliation and prayer.
This day would be a day of fasting and weeping
because we're made out of dust and dirt, and dust and dirt is our future.

If only you knew the cost of your sin, the death and stink on us.
We are only worthy to weep, fast, and mourn (v 12) every day,
“for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment” (Luther's Small Catechism).

You are dirt that does dirt.
For you sin. You sin in thought, you sin in word, and you sin in deed.

It means from dirt you came and to dirt you go.
Not even a casket will hold it back.

[Jesus took your Dirt]

But God comes to our rescue!
He will *not* be fair to you or give the punishment you've earned.
No, he is “gracious and merciful,” he is “slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love”
(v 13). Thus says Joel and it sounds like Joel is reciting Israel's catechism.

God is all *that*, for all this dirt, my dirt.
For with a loud and urgent voice, God says, ***“All this death and decay are not from me!”***

God never brought Adam out of the mud just so he could kill him.
We may be clay figures, but we are not God's toys or game pieces.
We are dear creations.

Our value is not found in the soil from which we came;
our value is found in our Father in heaven,
our value is found with his “treasures in heaven” (Mt 6:20)
—a heaven to which people go, *you* go.
A place where people *are*, with God.

But your decaying and sinful body couldn't last one second in heaven or with God.
So God performed a miracle even greater than the creation of man from the dirt.

God put his eternal Son in the same human body that you have, put him there forever.

Look, and see God's beloved Son, “God of God” down with and in the dirt.
Holy incarnation! Miraculous condescension!

For then the Father poured your sin over Jesus' body.

He beat and ripped and tore, judged, condemned, and killed Jesus in that body.

On the third day, he raised Jesus up from the earth.

On Easter, the true Adam, the truest Man, rises out of the ground once and for all.

It is Jesus with real human flesh and blood like yours.

Only *his* flesh is immortal, never to become dirt again.

And his blood is life-giving forever, never to allow decay again.

CHRIST HAS OVERCOME YOUR DIRT AND DEATH BY TAKING ON THE DIRT YOU'RE MADE OF
AND THE DIRT YOU'VE DONE.

[*Body and Blood Changes All*]

In his holy death, he makes you clean, washed in blood.

And not even death will hold you, for "I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body"!

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| The blood circulating in your body right now will keep you alive for some time longer, but not forever. Your blood cannot keep your flesh from decaying. | Jesus' blood can and <i>does</i> preserve your skin and bones and body and soul forever. It is readying you even now to live forever. |
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You need his body and blood in you, on you, and all over you.

In him, the dead are being raised, you have eternal life, you are immortal in Christ.

Without him, you must return to the earth, where worms live and make a feast.

And without him, on the Last Day, the *real* final judgment, your body would be raised,
but for condemnation, for a place in hell, where worms never die.

Who can endure the coming of this day without Jesus?

In other words, without Jesus, you have nothing and you are nothing.

But *with* Jesus, by Jesus,

you are worth everything and you have everything already. So come.

Call the congregation to church, fill the pews. "

Assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants" (Joel 2:16);
all are gathered here for God's holy purpose
and this great service of prayer and supplication.

Every guilty one, come, every one with no excuses left, arise.

"Blow the trumpet . . . ; consecrate a fast" (v 15).

God calls for **"a solemn assembly"** (v 15).

Everyone, come,
even the bridegroom with his bride on their wedding night
aren't exempt from this repentance (v 16).

So it is for all of us: babies, newlyweds, and you.
For you are worth heaven itself.
Even more, you are worth the very life of God himself,
for he has died on a cross in your place to bring you here.

You are holy. You are immortal. You are royalty. You are not dirt and ash.
You are wound into the very Body of Christ by the flesh and blood of God himself,
baptized into his living and dying and rising,
fed at this altar's cup and plate
by the God who rescues by his Son.

So direct the priests, the ministers of the Lord,
to go "between the vestibule and the altar" (v 17),
to the very door into the holy place of God's temple
with all the people assembled in the great court
crying out, "Spare your people, O LORD" (v 17).

And so he spares you, saves you *now*.

It is a reversal of fortunes!
You brought only sin, dirt, and death.
God gives you forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life,
his very body and blood.

[Conclusion]

Your ashes, your weeping, and your mourning are but for a little while longer.
But the treasure is, and will ever be, only Christ, forever. Amen.
You are the body of Christ, each one of you part of it! Amen!