In the midst of life we are in death. To whom may we look for help, but from you Lord? If the last few years and the last week have taught us anything, it is that we cannot take life for granted. Pandemic, war, and who knows what else might lie around the corner. The precious spark that animates this bundle of cells is fragile. It can be infected or blown to smithereens at the whim of a rampant virus or a meglamaniac. And today, Ash Wednesday, is a powerful reminder of our mortality. Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return. We don’t always want to be reminded that we are just passing through this planet. Eternal youth is one of the Gods of our age. To delay aging and death is the holy grail of many industries, quite a few of them round the corner in Harley Street.

But lest we think these bones, this flesh is immortal, Genesis reminds us of our impermanence; that God formed us from the dust of the ground and breathed life into our nostrils. That is why he loves us. Psalm 103 reminds us that the Lord has compassion for those who fear him, for he knows how we were made, he remembers that we are dust. Coming to terms with our mortality may give us pause for thought. It may make us reassess our priorities. But ultimately I suggest, it is lifegiving. It need not make us gloomy. Instead, THIS Lent is one for treasuring the life that God has given us. Those of us who begin THIS Lent have survived a deadly disease. We thank God and remember those who did not. THIS Lent we are inspired by the courage and spirit of the Ukrainian people in the face of mortal danger. They have the courage to defend their lives and their freedom.

It is BECAUSE life is limited and often threatened, that we appreciate beauty, joy, friendship, study, health, faith, in the years of pandemic and approaching war. It is BECAUSE life is limited that Lenten disciplines can be life giving. By adding additional prayer time, we nurture our relationship with the Lord. By attending to our consumption, we cherish our bodies and our planet.
By giving more, we show love to our brothers and sisters. Its all positive stuff!

And so this Lent, I have three suggestions. Treasure, pray and give. Treasure the things that give you life. Intentionally, intensively, thankfully. Pray fervently for the peoples of Ukraine. Give money or goods to help refugees. Treasure, pray, give. All life giving, all Lenten. To end, a poem. Blessing the Dust by Jan Richardson

All those days
you felt like dust,
like dirt,
as if you all had to do
was turn your face
toward the wind
and be scattered
to the four corners

or swept away
by the smallest breath
as insubstantial

did you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?

This is the day
we freely say
we are scorched.

This is the hour
we are marked
by what has made it
through the burning

This is the moment
we ask for blessing
that lives within
the ancient ashes,
that makes its home
inside of the soil of
this sacred earth.

So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.
Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less
than we are

but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,
within the dirt,
within the stuff

of which the world
is made
and the stars that blaze
in our bones
and the galaxies that spiral
inside of the smudge
we bear.