

## We are Like Grasses: Gone -- Ash Wednesday 2014

Living here, with the hills and the great ocean right across the road from our homes, with this beautiful jagged coastline continually beckoning our gaze, we have easy access to the wonders of God's creation.

One of the most compelling sights is the progress of crop farm agriculture in the valleys and flatlands. What we see now as big, empty fields soon become lush with cabbages and cauliflower, delicate with grasses, bushy with beets or beans. At a certain angle, you get a glimpse within hours of a rain that hints at what will happen. Suddenly the fields will overflow with life, and overnight (it seems to those of us who aren't doing the work) they become empty again, flat, dry, silently awaiting the seed and water that start another life cycle. Meanwhile the crops themselves go off, to feed and comfort people and animals near and far.

We are like this. Our lives have a suddenness to them. Ask any parent, waving goodbye with a hopeful smile in a driveway or airport, ask them how long ago it seems they were holding that life on a forearm and that tiny head in the palm of one hand. We are like the crops. Planted and flourishing suddenly in this world, mighty, delicate, some bushy and, as the psalmist insists: like the grasses, gone. The real question for us becomes: "Whom will we feed?" "Who we gonna comfort?"

In order to discover and develop who we are, we must remind ourselves and accept what we are. To build a

house, you have to be aware of the properties of wood and stone and glass – just ask the three little pigs. To build a life, you must accept what the psalmist says: we are like grasses gone. This is uncomfortable. I don't like being reminded of anything I think I know already. In our tradition, during the Communion service, the Celebrant offers the bread and wine with: "The gifts of God for the people of God." All right. Thank you. But sometimes they decide to add: "...and you are the people of God!" Uhhh, I know. What do you think I'm doing here? You don't need to remind me whose people I am... annoying... patronizing... pedantic. At this point, it helps me to lighten up, to get a life, as they say. If I'm so God's peoply and all, why shouldn't I enjoy being reminded of it? I get this...now – took me awhile. I have gotten better about being reminded of good things. But I still don't enjoy being reminded of uncomfortable things, such as: 'We are like grasses gone.'

Movie fans remember Robin Hood. Not the Erroll Flynn, not the Audrey Hepburn-Sean Connery, not the Mel Brooks, each compelling in its own way, but the cartoon version, with those Roger Miller songs, especially the refrain, "Life is brief, but when it's gone, love goes on and on." It's not just cartoon philosophy, it's Ash Wednesday theology. Because we know, from the promise breathed into us through Christ that God's love is forever. It gives us full freedom to accept the shortness of life and enjoy the business of feeding and comforting whomever we can.

Today we are reminded both of life's brevity, and of life's urgent business. We are like the grasses, gone, so the feeding and the comforting is an urgent undertaking -- pun intended. As the triumph of Christ demonstrates, God's love goes way beyond death, so too each of our acts of feeding and comforting lasts forever. Therein lieth the paradox: We must begin our business of taking care of each other immediately – as suddenly as our lives – and we have forever to finish it.

Today we are reminded of something we already know, and we learn again to get a life. We mark ourselves, with a smudgy physical sign of the briefness of our lives and suddenly begin again to take care of each other. We promise ourselves and each other to spend the next forty days in gentle but vigorous examination of and reflection on what we are, how we've been and who we are becoming. And we move through our world: our churches, communities and homes in excitement and expectation of the refuge, the purpose and the joy that come to everyone who tries to breathe the sudden Holy Spirit. This is the food of all who follow the freedom of the risen Christ; it is the comfort of all who spend their days looking for glimmers of life in the fields of a crazy world.