

Suttons Bay Congregational Church
Psalm 51:10 Ash Wednesday

February 6, 2008
Rev. Robin Long

Stop it, just stop it. Ash Wednesday is our “stop it, just stop it” service. Tonight is the night when an intimate group of us gather to admit and confess, to mourn and to grieve, that all is not well. Tonight we jump off the dizzying carousel of life with its garishly painted horses and loud, tinny music to say—Enough. I’ve had enough. All is not well.

It’s easy to pick up the paper and say all is not well when we read about the latest killing of innocents in Iraq or to be aghast at the suffering of the people in Tennessee and other states that were hit hard by yesterday’s storms. We look at them and say, “All is not well.” That’s not the tough part. The tough part isn’t to look at what’s around us and say “all is not well.” The tough part is to look at what’s within us and confess that all is not well. And that’s what we do tonight. We stop it, we just stop it. We stop the denial, stop the pretending, stop the posturing. Tonight we sit ourselves squarely in front of a mirror that reflects to us—not what’s on the outside, but rather what’s on the inside. And we are brave as we try and see that which we know God sees all the time—we see the imperfections, the mistakes, the sin, the inadequacies, the things we have done and the things we have left undone. We take a moment to look, to really look, and we realize that all is not well and we must stop it, we can’t keep fooling ourselves.

Truth be told, we may be able to keep fooling a good number of other folks. Folks who look at us and think that because we look how we look, or drive what we drive, or wear what we wear, or live where we live that because of these material things—that all must be well for us. Indeed, most of the time we put a good deal of our time and energy perpetuating the myth that these things create, the myth that all is well. But really we know it’s not. We know we’re not well.

And so we come here tonight, bravely and with a healthy dose of trepidation, we come here to admit to ourselves and to God that all is not well. We come here to stare into that looking glass and see what God sees. We come to fess up and plead “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” We yearn for hearts that are clean and free. Hearts free from greed and mistrust, hearts free from revenge and jealousy, hearts free from doubt and grudges, hearts free from guilt and misgivings. And so we stop the craziness of life, we pause in the endless cycle of busyness and motion and acquisition. And in that stopping place of quiet and solemnity, that place that is this sanctuary on this night among these brothers and sisters in Christ, we stop and confess our sin and together we pray, “Create in me a clean heart, O God.