

# *Ash Wednesday*

February 26, 2020

## **Daily Acts of Courage**

by The Rev. Jan Kwiatkowski

**W**orking with individuals and families as a hospice chaplain was one of the happiest times in my professional life. When I make this statement, I'd say 95% of people look at me quizzically and ask how I could do that work. They'd especially ask that when I was taking care of a dying infant, child, or teen and their families. Looking back, I realize that I have learned more than I thought I had about faithful courageous living from the dying.

I used to think of courage as BIG, BOLD ACTION, like a firefighter running into a burning building. And, of course, these actions take courage. From my hospice families and colleagues, I learned about a different kind of courage. A kind of courage that shows up in the small, specific choices we make every day of our lives. A kind of courage that shows up and is present in the big and little, joyful and agonizing, moments of everyday life.

What I came to understand is that as people of faith we live life on a continuum between fear and courage. I learned that those who live life from a stance of courage move toward the end of life in a completely different way than those who live from a stance of fear. Courageous decisions about health, time, relationships, repairing relationships, boundaries, self-care, or work made throughout life's journey increase not only their capacity to love themselves, but also the capacity to love everyone around them. Fear-based choices have the opposite effect. I learned that living faithfully and courageously is a lifelong spiritual practice.

Most of us are probably not going to be performing frequent big, bold acts of courage, but each of us is called to the bold, daily action of loving God and each other with our whole selves. We are called to let our most protected selves be vulnerable to God's transforming love. We are called to increase the strength of our ability to respond in love. We are called to learn, to listen, and perhaps to change our minds about what we think we

