

### **Wednesday, April 16: Ashes**

*Written by Sarah Calvert, District Superintendent, Mountain View District of the United Methodist Church, Virginia*

<https://open.spotify.com/track/7FihoA0WgTT21DkWR7wbYR?si=BUYk9o9iSIaTbkDf4q5-ig>

*What's left to say?*

*These prayers ain't working anymore*

*Every word shot down in flames*

*What's left to do with these broken pieces on the floor?*

*I'm losing my voice calling on you*

*'Cause I've been shaking*

*I've been bending backwards 'til I'm broke*

*Watching all these dreams go up in smoke*

*Let beauty come out of ashes*

*Let beauty come out of ashes*

*And when I pray to God all I ask is*

*Can beauty come out of ashes?*

*Can you use these tears to put out the fires in my soul?*

*'Cause I need you here, whoa*

*'Cause I've been shaking*

*I've been bending backwards 'til I'm broke*

*Watching all these dreams go up in smoke*

*Let beauty come out of ashes*

*Let beauty come out of ashes*

*And when I pray to God all I ask is*

*Can beauty come out of ashes?*

*Can beauty come out of ashes?*

Songwriters: Jordan Smith / Patrick Martin / Tedd Tjornhom

Ashes lyrics © Fox Music, Inc, Universal Music Publishing Group

Celine Dion's powerful voice in "Ashes" poses a poignant question, one that resonates even amidst the comedic backdrop of *Deadpool 2*: In our darkest moments, when life feels like a pile of ashes, is God still present? This question, born from broken dreams, lost hopes, and overwhelming pain, is one we all wrestle with, especially during Lent, a season of introspection and spiritual renewal.

Our "ashes" can take many forms. They might be the shattered remnants of a relationship, the sting of a missed opportunity, the weight of chronic illness, or the gnawing fear of an uncertain future. It's okay to acknowledge these feelings. It's okay to bring them to God. In fact, it's *essential*. God isn't afraid of our anger, our frustration, or our despair. As the Wesleyan tradition emphasizes, God's grace is prevenient—it goes before us, meeting us even in the depths of our pain. God desires a relationship with us, not a performance of perfect faith.

Lamentations is one of the books of the Bible I want to avoid at all costs, but the words ring true at painful times in our lives –

Lamentations 3:17-20-

*<sup>17</sup> my soul is bereft of peace;*

*I have forgotten what happiness is;*

*<sup>18</sup> so I say, "Gone is my glory*

*and all that I had hoped for from the Lord."*

*<sup>19</sup> The thought of my affliction and my homelessness  
is wormwood and gall!*

*<sup>20</sup> My soul continually thinks of it  
and is bowed down within me.*

One of the most challenging aspects of suffering is the feeling that our prayers go unanswered, that God is distant or even absent. Yet, even in our doubt, God is present, offering grace upon grace. It's in these moments of vulnerability, when we feel most broken, that God's love can truly penetrate our hearts. We believe God's grace is not limited to the "deserving" but is freely offered to all.

I experienced this firsthand years ago. After years of infertility treatments we had a devastating failed adoption, and I found myself in a pit of despair. I had not been in a church for ten years, but I finally cried out to God in anger and frustration, questioning everything. And in that darkness, God met me. Not with easy answers or immediate solutions, but with a quiet, persistent presence. God's grace sustained me. Months later, our agency called and said they had a mother ready to do an adoption, and we were the only family that had their paperwork ready – from our failed previous attempt. We were then blessed with our son, Matthew. He's now 31, a testament to the fact that beauty can indeed emerge from ashes. His adoption drew me back into church community, and is a firm piece of my understanding of my calling to ministry.

Lamentations 3:21-23

*<sup>21</sup> But this I call to mind,*

*and therefore I have hope:*

*<sup>22</sup> The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,<sup>[b]</sup>*

*his mercies never come to an end;*

*<sup>23</sup> they are new every morning;*

*great is your faithfulness.*

This experience taught me a profound truth: In our weakness, God finds us. In our brokenness, God transforms us. In our despair and doubt, God pours out love upon us. This isn't a Pollyannaish denial of pain, but a deep recognition of God's unwavering presence in the midst of it. As we journey through Lent, let us be honest with ourselves and with God. Let us pour out our hearts, even if our voices tremble and crack. For in the ashes of our lives, God's grace is sufficient, a beautiful and transformative gift.