

## Ash Wednesday

2/26/20

One of the great pastors, writers, and teachers of our time is the Congregational minister, Lillian Daniel. Several of us had the chance to go hear her speak in Chicago a couple of weeks ago and try to learn more from her. One of her gifts is that she is a great storyteller. One of the stories she tells is about a busy young man who was walking a country road toward the market in town. As he was walking he came up behind a poor farmer who was taking his hog to market. The market was a few miles away, and as the young man walked briskly, he got closer to the slow-moving farmer and caught sight of a spectacle. The farmer was picking up this enormous hog, carrying it about twenty feet, and then dropping it in exhaustion. Then the farmer would wipe the sweat from his brow, take a few minutes to catch his breath, and pick up the hog again.

When the young man caught up with the farmer he had to comment. "That is the most inefficient way to get a hog to market I've ever seen. The market's half an hour away but this is going to take you all day. Why don't you just let the hog walk?" To which the farmer replied, "Shucks, son. ? Time ain't nothing to a hog!"

I laughed when I heard the story, thinking that it's so true that we often think of the young man who has it all together, hurrying from one thing to another, not the farmer carrying the hog. Who are you in this story? Are you the rushing young man, full of concerns for efficiency, always worried about getting to the next thing? Or are you the old farmer, going about things your own way even when it doesn't make too much sense, carrying your burdens even when they exhaust you?

But then, as Daniel told the story, what if we are the hog? What if all of us are hogs? And what if God is the farmer? God picks us up, carries us a little way on the journey, and then puts us down for a rest. Then God picks us up and carries us a little farther, and stops, giving us small increments on the journey, one piece at a time, in the hope that we might stop focusing on where we are going and instead

notice where we are. After all time ain't nothing to a hog.<sup>1</sup>

I feel that way about Lent. We begin tonight our observance of Lent and it is so tempting to look ahead to the end, to start planning for Easter. But God doesn't carry us all that way yet. He's put us down here, on Ash Wednesday, to stop and look around and see where we are. We are at the beginning of forty days, time to stop and think, time to wait quietly for God today, not look too far ahead of ourselves. And tomorrow God will take us a little farther. What will he teach us tomorrow? What will we see? Who will be with us? Lent is not a quick journey to Easter. It is forty days, forty steps, forty mornings we get to stop and look around and see where God has taken us. That's why we have the Lent Calendar that we made this year. It doesn't encourage us to give up meat or sweets for all of Lent, or to fast two days a week for the next seven weeks. It encourages us to do something today. Just today. Take a mindful moment today. Let's not hurry Lent this year. And let's do this together.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel, Lillian. *When 'Spiritual But Not Religious' is Not Enough*. pp. 119-120.