

## Station One Reflection: Dirt

The story from Genesis that we refer to commonly as “The Fall” is the source of that famous phrase: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Given that this story is often associated with sin, disobedience, and punishment, is it any wonder that we hear those words as ominous and even threatening?

It is time for us to reimagine the word “dust” and its cousins, dirt and soil. When God breathed life into humanity, the material God used for that first human being was not “dust,” as in something dry, lifeless, and inorganic. It was humus—good dirt, rich soil, the foundation of life on earth. God did not take something inert and add life. God took something teeming with potential, full of creative energy, and added a spark of the divine.

Soil is the perfect metaphor for the cycle of life, but in fact it is much more than a metaphor. Soil itself is alive. A mere handful of soil has more living organisms than there are people on the planet.

Obviously, healthy soil is necessary for food production; it is equally essential to the process of decomposition, without which our planet would be uninhabitable! So, in a very real sense, death is not the end of the life cycle. Decomposition means that death is a step toward new life, which itself comes forth from the soil.

As Charles E. Kellogg once said, **“There can be no life without soil and no soil without life.”**

Even with all of this in mind, we have barely touched on how miraculous and fascinating soil really is. If people were *only* dirt, we would still be something infinitely beautiful and important.

And the truth is, we know we are so much more than our physical presence, as rich and creative and wondrous as that is.

So, at the start of your prayer walk, take a moment to consider the soil in front of you. Perhaps you can give thanks to the Creator for this hard-working, essential substance, which quite literally connects all of life in a complex and interdependent web. You may want to touch it and even smell it. You might place a bit of soil on the back of your hand and rub it in, so that the smudge remains with you on the walk.

As you continue through the next four stations, you might want to try walking more slowly than usual, placing your feet on the ground in a way that helps you to actually notice what is under your feet. If you are in a hurry now, find a time later this week to walk in this slow and contemplative way.

Can you spend time during this season of Lent finding beauty and wonder in humble people, places, and things? What about things that you consider “dirty”—is there a way to redeem them, even in your imagination, and see them as beautiful, or at least necessary and meaningful?

Perhaps from time to time you can even take a few minutes to lie down on the ground, somewhere outside. Notice the smells and other sensations. Most of all, notice that the ground beneath you is holding you up, with no effort needed by you. There is nothing you need to do to be supported by the earth.

Consider the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, who advises us all to, “Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet.”

*Note: If you would like to read an article or two about soil for the non-specialist (like me!), you might start with one of the following. Decomposition, by Terry Watkins.*

*<https://science.jrank.org/pages/1967/Decomposition.html> Soil Biology, by the Soil Science Society of America. <https://www.soils4teachers.org/biology-life-soil>*