**Ash Wednesday**

**March 6, 2019**

“Create in Me a Clean Hard Drive”

Let’s begin our Lenten journey with a simple question. But I’ll warn you there is no simple answer. Where is sin? Where do you find sin? Where do you see sin? What does sin look like?

Well there is one simple, obvious answer. Sin is all around us. Sin is the latest murder in the news. Sin is people treating one another poorly. Sin is lying, cheating, and stealing. In Lent sin is chocolate, cookies, and cake. So there you have it: the simple answer is that sin is on the outside: sin is evident in what we do and say; it is on the outside for others to see.

But here’s the hard answer. This is the answer that calls to us from deep within the wilderness of Lent. Sin is also on the inside. Yes, our sinful actions and words appear on the outside. But they flow from the sin that resides in our hearts, that which is known only to us and to God. Sin is both the cause and the effect; it is both the source and the symptom.

Jesus was very clear about this. He taught the disciples: *Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.*

So, let me try this analogy out with you. I’m not much of a computer guy. In fact, I only recently realized that you don’t need to put screens on the windows of a computer. But I think I get the basics. At the core of a computer there’s this thing called a hard drive. It serves as both the engine that makes it go, and as the memory where everything is stored.

Then there’s this stuff called software. It’s what comes from outside the computer and directs the actions of the hard drive; sort of like the driver of the hard drive. If I’ve got this right, when we put software onto our hard drive it’s called downloading…or is it uploading? As long as the software and the hard drive are in sync and playing nicely, life is good.

But here’s the problem. Sometimes the software we download from the outside messes with the hard drive on the inside. There are these nasty little anomalies called viruses. They get into the inner workings of the hard drive and suddenly all the actions of the computer are random and at risk. Emails get sent to strangers, precious documents get locked or lost, favorite DVD’s get chewed up, and just starting the computer takes half a day.

When this happens most of us have to turn to someone else. Few of us have the expertise or experience to delve into the depths of our computers and work on an infected hard drive. We’re resigned to call our friends at the Geek Squad and ask them to remotely crawl into the core of our computer, and pray it can be restored. If your hard drive has ever been compromised, you know the deep frustration of not being able to operate as you could.

Tonight we hear the desperate, infected, and sinful Psalmist cry out to God. Bad software has corrupted his hard drive. Sin has corrupted his heart, and so he turns to the Geek Squad of hearts: God. He asks God to remotely enter the core of his being to repair and restore his heart. He calls out: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.*

In Lent we are called to go beyond the simple answer. Yes, let’s focus on being more respectful, kind, and loving. Yes, let’s get more exercise, eat better, and watch less TV.

But let’s go deeper. Let’s crawl into our core, that hard drive deep within us we call the heart. Let us go to the source and the cause of our sins and not just the symptoms and effects. Let us pray that what comes out of our mouths would not defile, but would give hope, light, comfort and healing. Like the Psalmist, let us pray to God for cleansing that would restore us to right relationship with God and our neighbor.

May God bless our wandering through the wilderness this Lent; that we would receive right spirits - and clean hearts. Amen.