

February 16, 2016

Dear Grace Church Family and Friends,

Last week, we entered into this season of Lent by imposing ashes on our foreheads in the shape of a cross. These ashes were a sign of our mortality and penitence, a reminder of our dependence on God for life, love and forgiveness.

For Kate Bowler, a thirty-five year old Assistant Professor at Duke Divinity School, no such reminder was necessary. Bowler had recently been diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer, and therefore, was facing her mortality and dependence on God each and every day.

As she wrestled with her diagnosis, Bowler wrote a piece in the *New York Times*, reflecting on her new reality. She said, in part:

Cancer has kicked down the walls of my life. I cannot be certain I will walk my son to his elementary school someday or subject his love interests to cheerful scrutiny. I struggle to buy books for academic projects I fear I can't finish for a perfect job I may be unable to keep. I have surrendered my favorite manifestoes about having it all, managing work-life balance and maximizing my potential. I cannot help but remind my best friend that if my husband remarries everyone will need to simmer down on talking about how special I was in front of her... Cancer requires that I stumble around in the debris of dreams I thought I was entitled to and plans I didn't realize I had made.

But cancer has also ushered in new ways of being alive. Even when I am this distant from Canadian family and friends, everything feels as if it is painted in bright colors. In my vulnerability, I am seeing my world without the Instagrammed filter of breezy certainties and perfectible moments. I can't help noticing the brittleness of the walls that keep most people fed, sheltered and whole. I find myself returning to the same thoughts again and again: *Life is so beautiful.*

The word "Lent" comes from an old English word meaning "spring," a reference, no doubt, to what happens outside during this time, but also, what is supposed to happen on the inside, in our hearts and souls. Lent is an opportunity for us to see life in a new way. Forty days to discover new ways of being alive. Forty days to realize, again and again, life is so beautiful, thanks to our loving, liberating and life-giving God.

See you in church,  
*Andrew*