The idea first came to me in listening to a song by one of my favorite Christian songwriters, Bryan Sirchio. His song "Green World" has the following refrain:

God made this green world green
Air and water clean
We come from the earth, and to earth we shall return
Let's go back to Genesis 2 and relearn
Humans are here in the garden to serve
And service is the purpose of God-given power
We are more the earth's than earth is ours

The third line made me think, How about changing the line on Ash Wednesday for the Imposition of Ashes to, "Remember that you are earth, and to earth you shall return" -- which is basically another way to translate adama in Gen. 2:7. Isn't the deeper meaning of Genesis 2:7 that we are made of the same stuff as the earth, and so our fates are bound together? We are called to be stewards of the earth from which we are made. It is as Sirchio says, "Humans are here in the garden to serve, And service is the purpose of God-given power."

Does this take us too far from the traditional Ash Wednesday theme? I might argue that, given the fact that the Imposition of Ashes is tied to Gen. 2:7, this way of striking the theme might be more true to the overall intentions of beginning the Lenten season with Ash Wednesday. If salvation from our sin is the theme of Lent, then let's put the matter into its proper cosmic, creational framework. The scope of God's salvation in Jesus Christ is the whole Creation. And our sinfulness is tied directly to the salvation of Creation because of our failure to live according to our true and original calling, namely, to be stewards with God of God's Creation. Redemption from our sin of straying away from our calling as stewards means redemption of the whole Creation. If we are redeemed to finally take care of the earth as we should, then the earth also begins to be redeemed.

Isn't this the meaning of Romans 8:18-25?

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of
God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?

But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

This, then, is my choice for the Second Lesson, Romans 8:18-25. I changed all the lessons (leaving the Psalm the same, the traditional Psalm 51). Genesis 2 is a natural for the First Lesson:

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up -- for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground;

but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground --

then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." --

Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-17

The Gospel Lesson isn't as obvious. I have chosen John 9:1-7 for two reasons: (1) the healing of the man born blind with mud seems a symbolic reference to Gen. 2:7 as continuing the work of creation; and (2) the use of the word "work" in reference to Jesus' Father would seem to underscore that image. The work of the Father is precisely that of creating, and Jesus
continues that work of creation by healing the man. Healing itself is a work of continuing creation. Jesus imitates his Father by using soil of the earth to accomplish that work. Here, then, is the Gospel Lesson:
As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.  
2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"
3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.
4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.
5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."
6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes,
7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. --

John 9:1-7

References

1. For wonderful resources on the general "Green" theme for the parish, see the website "Web of Creation: Ecology Resources to Transform Faith and Society."

2. For more on Genesis 2, see Lent 1A.

3. For more on Romans 8:18-25, see Proper 11A.

4. For more on John 9:1-7, see Lent 4A.

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Idea for Ash Wednesday

Link to "The Text This Week" -- the Most Comprehensive Lectionary Site on the Internet