

*ASH WEDNESDAY*

(1930)

**T.S. ELIOT**

Because I do not hope to turn again  
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope

Because I know that time is always time  
And place is always and only place  
And what is actual is actual only for one time  
And only for one place  
I rejoice that things are as they are ...

And pray to God to have mercy upon us  
And I pray that I may forget  
These matters that with myself I too much discuss  
Too much explain  
Because I do not hope to turn again  
Let these words answer  
For what is done, not to be done again  
May the judgment not be too heavy upon us

And the light shone in darkness and  
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled  
About the centre of the silent Word.

O my people, what have I done unto thee?

This is the time of tension between dying and birth

Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood

Teach us to care and not to care

Teach us to sit still

Even among these rocks.

Our peace in His will

And even among these rocks

Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

This is a prayer of penitence, beginning with a firm conviction of amendment, “Because I do not hope to turn again” – in other words, “I intend, with thy grace, to sin no more.” This penitent asks for absolution, “Pray to God to have mercy ... And I pray that I may forget these matters ... Let these words answer for what is done, not to be done again” – in other words, “I confess these sins, and I am sorry for having done them.”

In the midst of our infidelities, the Lord says to the depth of our souls, “O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? (Micah 6:3).” And we bow in shame and sorrow. “This is the time of tension between dying and birth” – in other words, “This is the moment of truth, will I mend my ways or will I abandon the Way?”

“Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood” – “Help us to speak honestly of ourselves.”

“Teach us to care and not to care” – in other words, “Help us care about one another, and not attached to passing things.”

“Let my cry come unto Thee,” O Lord.