

Ash Wednesday

February 22, 2023 + 7:00 PM



On Ash Wednesday we begin our forty-day journey toward Easter with a day of fasting and repentance. Marking our foreheads with dust, we acknowledge that we die and return to the earth. At the same time, the dust traces the life-giving cross indelibly marked on our foreheads in our Baptism. While we journey through Lent in pilgrimage to God, we've already been reconciled to God through Christ. We humbly pray for God to make our hearts clean while we rejoice that "now is the day of salvation." Returning to our baptismal call, we more intentionally bear the fruits of mercy and justice in the world.

*Congregational responses and hymn lyrics are printed in **boldface italics**.*

GATHERING

OPENING PSALMODY: Psalm 51

Musical arrangement by John Michael Talbot. Sung by Pr Dave.

*Have mercy, Lord, in Your kindness; in Your compassion blot out my offenses.
Oh, wash me more and pull from my guilt; wash me and cleanse me from all of my sins.*

*Truly I know them, all my offenses; my sin is ever before me, O Lord;
Against You alone have I sinned.*

*Purify me, then I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Lord, let me hear rejoicing and gladness; turn away Your face from all of my sin.*

*A pure heart create for me, O Lord; put a steadfast spirit deep within me,
Nor cast me away from Your presence. Deprive me not of Your Spirit, O Lord.*

*Oh, rescue me, God my Helper, and my tongue shall declare all of Your goodness.
Open my lips, open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim all of Your praise.*

*For in sacrifice You take no delight; burnt offerings from me You would refuse.
My sacrifice is a contrite spirit; my humbled heart You will not spurn.
My sacrifice is a contrite spirit; my humbled heart You will not spurn.*

Have mercy, Lord, in Your kindness; In Your compassion blot out my offenses...

INVITATION AND CONFESSION:

God created us to experience joy in loving communion with God, with one another, and with all creation. But sin separates us from God, our neighbors, and the goodness of creation, and so we fail to enjoy the life our Creator intended for us. Indeed, by our sin we grieve the God who loves us, who doesn't want us to come under judgment, but rather to turn to God and live.

As disciples of the Lord Jesus, we're called to struggle against everything that leads us away from the love of God and our neighbors. Repentance, fasting, prayer, works of love— the disciplines of Lent— help us to wage this spiritual warfare. So let's commit ourselves to this struggle and confess our sins, asking God our Father for strength to remain steadfast in our Lenten pilgrimage.

Most holy and merciful God,

***we confess to You and to one another,
and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth,
that we've sinned by our own fault in thought, word, and deed,
by what we've done, and by what we've left undone.***

We haven't loved You with our whole heart, mind, and strength.

We haven't loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We haven't forgiven others as we've been forgiven.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

We've shut our ears to Your call to serve as Christ served us.

We haven't been true to the mind of Christ. We've grieved Your Holy Spirit.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

We confess to You, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness.

The pride, hypocrisy, and impatience in our lives,

we confess to You, Lord.

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people,

we confess to You, Lord.

Our anger at our own frustration, and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,

we confess to You, Lord.

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts,
and our dishonesty in daily life and work,

we confess to You, Lord.

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to bear witness to the faith in us,

we confess to You, Lord.

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we've done.

For our blindness to human need and suffering, our indifference to injustice and cruelty,

accept our repentance, Lord.

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors,
and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us,

accept our repentance, Lord.

For our waste and pollution of Your creation,
and our lack of concern for those who come after us,

accept our repentance, Lord.

Restore us, good Lord, and let Your anger depart from us.

Hear us, Lord, for Your mercy is great. Amen.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

*If you so desire (including children), come forward via the left-hand aisle
to receive the cross of ashes on your forehead, hearing there the words:*

“Remember that you’re dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Then proceed to the font, where you’ll receive the sign of the cross with water and the words:

“Buried with Christ and dead to sin, arise with Christ to live in Him.”

After receiving this dual signing, return to your seat via the right-hand aisle.

Once all have received the mark of the cross, we continue in prayer:

Accomplish in us, O God, the work of Your salvation,

that we may show forth Your glory in the world.

By the Cross and Passion of Your Son, Christ Jesus our Lord,

bring us with all Your saints to the joy of His resurrection.

Gracious God, out of Your love and mercy

You breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve You and our neighbors.
Call forth our prayers and acts of kindness,
and strengthen us to face our mortality with confidence in the mercy of Your Son,
Christ Jesus our Savior and Lord,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

COLLECT HYMN: “Our Father, We Have Wandered” ELW 606

Sung to the tune of “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded”

*Our Father, we have wandered and hidden from Your face,
In foolishness have squandered Your legacy of grace.
But now, in exile dwelling, we rise in fear and shame,
As, distant but compelling, we hear You call our name.*

*And now at length discerning the evil that we do,
Behold us, Lord, returning with hope and trust to You.
In haste You come to meet us, and home rejoicing bring,
In gladness there to greet us with calf and robe and ring.*

*O Lord of all the living, both banished and restored,
Compassionate, forgiving, and ever-caring Lord,
Grant now that our transgressing, our faithlessness may cease.
Stretch out Your hand in blessing, in pardon, and in peace.*

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<p>WORD AND PRAYER</p>

FIRST LESSON: Joel 2.1-2, 12-17

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it's near—² a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains, a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come...

¹²“Yet even now,” says the LORD, “return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³rend your hearts and not your clothing.” Return to the LORD your God, *who’s* gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment. ¹⁴Who knows whether *God won’t* turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?

¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her canopy. ¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar, let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, “Spare Your people, O LORD, and don’t make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

This is holy wisdom; this is holy word.

Thanks be to God!

SECOND READING: 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:10

St. Paul writes: Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we’re also well known to your consciences. We’re not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. For if we’re ‘beside ourselves’, it’s for God; if we’re in our right mind, it’s for you. For the love of Christ urges us on, because we’re convinced that One has died for all; therefore all have died. And He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died and was raised for them.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view. Even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know Him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there’s a new creation: everything old has passed away— *look*, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation— that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we’re ambassadors for Christ, since God is making His appeal through us. We entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God! For our sake *God* made Him who knew no sin to **be** sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

As we work together with Him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For He says, "At an acceptable time I’ve listened to you, and on a day of salvation I’ve helped you." *Look, now* is the acceptable time; *look, now* is the day of salvation!

We're putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry; but as servants of God we've commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We're treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see— we're alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

This is holy wisdom; this is holy word.

Thanks be to God!

THE HOLY GOSPEL: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Sung to the tune of "In the Cross of Christ I Glory"

***We are turning, Lord, to hear You; You are merciful and kind,
Slow to anger, rich in blessing, and with love to us inclined.***

The Holy Gospel according to St Matthew, the sixth chapter.

Glory to You, O Lord!

Jesus said to His disciples and the crowds gathered with them: "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

"So whenever you give alms, don't sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they've received their reward. But when you give alms, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you pray, don't be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they've received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who's in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you fast, don't look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they're fasting. Truly I tell you, they've received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who's in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“Don’t store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

This is the Gospel of our Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ!

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

PRAYERS AND SHARING OF THE PEACE OF CHRIST:

Drawn close to the heart of God, we offer our prayers
for the Church, the world, and all who are in need:

Renew Your church, O God. When we’ve drifted from our call to proclaim repentance and to guide Your people toward justice, lead us back to You. Encourage believers who hold the church’s doors open to those who’ve felt excluded. Merciful God, *receive our prayer.*

Renew our congregations, O God. During these forty days of Lent, confirm our sense of mission and expand our imagination for ministry. Deepen our faith, increase our love, and draw us into Your unfolding work of healing and restoration. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Renew Your creation, O God. Transform parched places into watered gardens, and preserve every creature that awaits the arrival of spring. Turn each of us from practices of environmental exploitation to become responsible stewards of all You have made. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Renew the nations, O God. Give voice to those on the margins and resolve to world leaders who seek to protect those most vulnerable. Loosen the bonds of injustice and bring an end to all violence, oppression, and persecution. Merciful God, *receive our prayer.*

Renew Your people, O God. Respond to those who cry out to You in secret or in seclusion. Equip us with compassion to care for those who experience homelessness, food insecurity, economic hardship, post-traumatic stress, and desolation of every kind. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Renew our lives, O God. Spare Your people from diseases of the body, mind, or spirit, and send healing to those overcome by illness or grief (especially). Restore to us the joy of Your salvation. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

As we mark ashes on our foreheads, we give You praise, O God, for all the saints who died and yet are alive with You. Receive us with them into Your eternal embrace. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Accept the prayers we bring, O God, on behalf of a world in need,
for the sake of Christ Jesus our Savior and Lord. *Amen.*

The peace of the Lord is with you always. *And also with you.*

Reconciled to God and to one another, we share a sign of Christ's peace.

MEAL

GATHERING OF OUR GIFTS AND SETTING OF THE TABLE

OFFERTORY CANTICLE:

Sung to the tune of "Sweet Hour of Prayer"

*Create in me a clean heart, Lord; renew my spirit in the right.
Take not Your Spirit from my life, nor cast me out, Lord, from Your sight.
If sacrifice were Your desire, Lord, I would bring it for my part.
But what I bring You will not scorn— a humble and a contrite heart.*

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER:

Blest are You, holy, mighty, and merciful Lord— heaven and earth are full of Your glory!
You laid the foundations of the universe and filled the world with Your wonders;
You lifted us from the dust and breathed into us the breath of life.
You called a people to Yourself, as a light to the nations;
You delivered them from slavery, led them to the land of Your promise,
challenged them through prophets, and brought them home from exile.
You so loved our broken world that, in the fullness of time,
You gave us Jesus Your only Son, who poured out His life for us even unto death,
that filled with the Spirit of His resurrection, we might have eternal life in Him.

In the night in which He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take and eat. This is My body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of Me." Again after supper He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of Me."

And so, remembering His life and His death, rejoicing in His resurrection, we await His promised final appearing when all things will be made whole in Him. By Your Spirit, bless us as we share this meal, that by this Holy Communion we who share the Lord's body and blood may live as His body in the world, channels of His healing love, until the whole universe rejoices in His endless life! All this we ask with joy through our Savior Jesus Christ, through whom we rejoice to pray:

***Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy Name!
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever! Amen.***

THE HOLY COMMUNION

*Now we share God's consecrated gifts among God's consecrated people, knowing that our living Lord Jesus is fully present with us in His Supper, giving Himself to us in bread and wine and forgiving love. Today, we'll share the Lord's Supper in our pews. As you came in, you each picked up a cup-and-wafer pack in the vestibule. Take that pack and unseal the wafer (under the first seal). When Pastor says, "**The body of Christ, given for you**", eat the bread and receive the body of Christ. Then unseal the cup (they're all grape juice). When Pastor says, "**The blood of Christ, shed for you**", drink the wine and receive the blood of Christ. We'll pause for silent prayer after we've all communed...*

*If you're joining us from your home, we invite you to share the bread and cup with one another. When giving the bread to your neighbor, say "**The body of Christ, given for you.**" When giving the wine/grape juice say, "**The blood of Christ, shed for you.**" Whatever's left over may be reverently eaten and drunk by everyone after our worship is over. Once we've all shared in the body and blood of Christ, we continue in blessing and prayer:*

SENDING

POST-COMMUNION BLESSING AND PRAYER:

May the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen us and keep us in His grace.

Amen.

Embodied God, at Your table we've tasted the goodness of Jesus.

With the eyes of our hearts open to Your promise,

empower us to hear the needs of our neighbors and touch the world with Your love through Christ Jesus our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

BENEDICTION:

And now may God the Wellspring of Love, † Christ Jesus the Resurrection and the Life, and the Holy Spirit of rebirth and reconciliation bless you in your Lenten journey. *Amen.*

SENDING HYMN: "Restore in Us, O God"

ELW 328

Sung to the tune of "Lord Jesus, Think on Me"

*Restore in us, O God, the splendor of Your love;
Renew Your image in our hearts, and all our sins remove.*

*O Spirit, wake in us the wonder of Your pow'r;
From fruitless fear, unfurl our lives like springtime bud and flow'r.*

*Bring us, O Christ, to share the fullness of Your joy;
Baptize us in the risen life that death cannot destroy.*

*Three-personed God, fulfill the promise of Your grace,
That we, when all our searching ends, may see You face to face.*

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DISMISSAL:

Go forth into the world to serve God with gladness.

Be of good courage; hold fast to what's good. Render no one evil for evil.

Strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people.

Love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thanks be to God!

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What's Holding You Back from Life?

What's holding you back from life? How has death invaded the middle of things and made you captive? Now's the time— the “acceptable time”— to do something about it! The ashen cross is placed upon our foreheads once again. Made from the dried palms of our last Passion Sunday celebration, the ashes tie together our endings and beginnings. As in Baptism, so in Lent: one life ends and a new life begins. The Gospel's DNA twists around full circle, spiraling us into the future. In one sense, we're where we've been before— but in another sense, we aren't. Last year's Lent should've changed us. If we seek life now, we must be vulnerable to change and growth.

The ash is a sign of death, the slap in the face to shock us into realizing that we don't have forever. Blow the trumpet! Call an emergency meeting! Time is running out. We don't have forever— but we do, most likely, have the next forty days in which we might act.

What shall we do? Repent— which means to get a new mind and heart. We must fast— which means we let go of those artificial dependencies that hold us back from life. (A fast of the heart, not of the belly.) We pray— which means we get into real communication with the God who'll save us and raise us from the dead. (Don't hold back!) And we take on acts of charity, committed to life in community with believer and non-believer alike. (Isn't that what God had in mind all along— justice and compassion?)

The ash is also a sign of life, the echo of a Baptism that washed over us and anointed us. It's time for us to become what we were meant to be all along— NOW!

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All those days
you felt like dust,
like dirt,
as if all you had to do
was turn your face
toward the wind
and be scattered
to the four corners
or swept away
by the smallest breath
as insubstantial—

Did you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?

This is the day
we freely say
we are scorched.

This is the hour
we are marked
by what has made it
through the burning.



This is the moment
we ask for the blessing
that lives within
the ancient ashes,
that makes its home
inside the soil of
this sacred earth.

So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.

Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less than we are

but for claiming
what God can do within the dust,
within the dirt,
within the stuff
of which the world is made,
and the stars that blaze
in our bones,
and the galaxies that spiral
inside the smudge we bear.

• *Jan Richardson*

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