

Ash Wednesday ~ 17 February 2021

Call to Worship *(Inspired by Joel 2:12-17)*

Return to the Lord with all of your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning. Take a good look at what is going on in your heart.

ALL: We will return to God because our God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, loves us without wavering and relents from punishing.

We, too, can relent - from the things that keep us from God. We can make ourselves a living offering to God, a blessing to others.

ALL: Let us call everyone together, people of all ages and stages of life, to return to the Lord and be present to all God has done for us.

Introduction to Lent

Friends, we gather here to mark the beginning of Lent, the time of year when we prepare ourselves to celebrate Christ's suffering, death and triumphant resurrection. During Lent we remember the humanity of Jesus and his temptation in the wilderness. In doing so, we are called to focus on our own humanity, our own temptation to sin against others, God and ourselves. For some people, sin brings up images of judgment and guilt, of do's and don'ts, even of painful shame. As we begin this Lenten journey, may we reflect on ourselves with the compassion of Jesus. May we commit to learning about what separates us from God, not so that we can feel guilt and shame, but so that we can experience grace, grow closer to God and live into the abundant life we are called to. We do this knowing that Jesus has gone before us, goes with us, and that because of him, our sins are forgiven in the eyes of God.

Opening Unison Prayer

Holy God, pour out your Spirit upon us as we prepare ourselves for a time of reflection and prayer. Give us a spirit of humility and openness to hearing what you have to say to us this day. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Hymn ~ Come and Find the Quiet Center #2128

Scripture: Isaiah 58:1-12

Ash Wednesday Message

Invitation to Observance of Lenten Discipline

The Israelites put ashes on their heads, wore sackcloth and fasted as a sign of mourning and repentance. As Christians, we too receive ashes at the beginning of Lent, a season where we reflect on our mortality and turn from away from sin and back to God. Just as God called the Israelites to repent inwardly as well as outwardly, let us also ask God to show us where we need to repent, ask forgiveness and change. Let the ashes be an outward reminder of the work we need to do on ourselves and in our communities. May they remind us that we owe our existence to the God who formed us from the earth and that we are united with all people in the human experience of finitude and frailty.

Song of Response ~ Bless the Lord My Soul

Thanksgiving over Ashes

Holy and gracious God, we thank you for these ashes and we receive them to remember that we are made of dust and live only as you give us life. We pray for a spirit of honesty and repentance this Lent as we reflect on our sins. Thank you for being the kind of God to whom we can bring our shortcomings in the confidence that you love us no matter what. In your Son's holy name, we pray. Amen.

The Imposition of Ashes

The leader will invite people forward to receive ashes on their hand.

The recipient of ashes may respond: Lord, teach me your ways.

Confession and Pardon

Leader: Ash Wednesday provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our sins, both those we do ourselves and those with which we willingly or absent-mindedly participate. The prophet Joel invites us to rend our hearts and not our clothing, to return to the Lord our God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Let us now as a community gathered in our need of God's grace and mercy, lift up those places where we ourselves and the world we share fall short of your vision for this world, O God.

Those gathered are invited to confess sins aloud (e.g. racism, poverty, violence). Each time something is named, the people respond:

In the midst of life, we are in death; from whom can we seek help?

Assurance of pardon.

We seek help from the Giver of Life, the Defeater of Death, who loves us so much that he gave his Son that we might live abundantly.

We are forgiven in the name of Jesus, and for this we give you praise, O God!

We are forgiven in the name of Jesus, and for this we give you praise, O God!

Praise Song ~ Falling On My Knees

Sacrament of Holy Communion

Invitation

Leader: Come, as we embark on the dawn of this new season.

Come, as we reflect upon the dusk of our lives.

Come, as we set aside our distractions and the concerns of our minds Come, as we focus on the heart of the matter.

God of light and dust be with you,

ALL: And also with you.

Leader: Open wide our hearts.

ALL: We open them up to our God.

Leader: Let us give thanks to God our creator.

ALL: Even in the midst of the wilderness, we give God our praise.

Prayer of Communion

Tonight, we come together to recall the magnificent common memories we have of our Christ. We remember his servant leadership and the unconditional love he had for humankind. Here and now, we give thanks for the steadfast love of God that we see reflected in Jesus the Christ. We are grateful for one another and for all the saints who have come to the table throughout history and to those who will gather here after we have returned to dust. With appreciation, we give thanks to the hands who have harvested the grapes and grains before us. In a spirit of active thanksgiving, we commit ourselves as servants to God's children, finding new ways of bringing justice, righteousness and love to the shadows on this earth.

May the Spirit come upon these elements. May the Spirit fill our hearts with love, kindness and acceptance. May the Spirit continue to aid us in our work in the world and as we cross boundaries of denominations and faith differences. May the Spirit empower us as we walk through these 40 days in the wilderness, as we face the sadness of the crucifixion and as we wait for the Christ's resurrection.

As Jesus continued on his journey, he could see that his time was drawing nearer. Our Christ knew that his love and leadership would take him to the cross. And as the final night was upon him, he drew close to his friends. To embrace the love he had with them, he shared one last table.

Jesus embraced the bread in his weathered hands, broke it, gave it to his friends asking them to remember him.

Jesus clasped the cup containing the fruit of the vine, gave thanks one last time and asked them to remember him.

In remembering him, we speak the words together in prayer, using the words closest to your hearts saying... Our Father, who art in heaven...(As we pray the Lord's Prayer in unity, please use the word closest to your hearts, whether it is sins, trespasses or debts.)

The bread of life. The cup of the new covenant. Both given to us. Both we partake in together as we remember our servant-leader Jesus the Christ.

Sharing of the Bread and Cup

Unison Prayer of Thanksgiving

Even as we come to the table tonight remembering our frailty with the dust on our hands, we also give God our thanks for this meal. We give our gratitude that we have come together as one Body of Christ. In these next 40 days and as we walk the road to the crucifixion, continue to keep us awake to the ways we can bring Jesus the Christ's servant-leadership to our world. Amen.

Closing Hymn ~ Come and Fill #2157 (sing as round)

Benediction

Postlude

Music Used with Permission ~ CCLI#2274807

Come and Find the Quiet Center #2128

Come and find the quiet center
In the crowded life we lead.
Find the room for Hope to enter
Find the frame where we are freed.
Clear the chaos and the clutter,
Clear our eyes that we can see
All the things that really matter,
Be at peace and simply be.

Silence is a friend that claims us
Cools the heat and slows the pace
God it is who speaks and names us,
Knows our being, touches base.
Making space within our thinking
Lifting shades to show the sun,
Raising courage when we're shrinking
Finding scope for faith begun.

In the spirit, let us travel, open to each other's pain,
Let our loves and fears unravel,
Celebrate the space we gain.
There's a place for deeper dreaming,
There's a time for heart to care,
In the Spirit's lively scheming
There is always room to spare.

Bless the Lord My Soul

Bless the Lord, my soul,
And bless his Holy Name
Bless the Lord, my soul,
Who leads me into Life. (Repeat)

It is God who forgives all your guilt,
Who heals every one of your ills.
Who redeems your life from the grave,
Who crowns you with love and compassion.

Bless the Lord, my soul
And bless his Holy name,
Bless the Lord my soul
Who leads me into life.

The Lord is compassion and love,
Slow to anger and rich in mercy,
God does not treat us according to our sins
Nor repay us according to our faults.

Bless the Lord, my soul,
And bless his Holy name,
Bless the Lord, my soul,
Who leads me into life.

As a Father has compassion on his children,
The Lord has pay on those who fear Him,
For God knows of what we are made,
God remembers that we are dust.

Bless the Lord, my soul,
And bless his Holy name,
Bless the Lord, my soul,
Who leads me into life.

Falling On My Knees

Hungry, I come to you, for I know You satisfy
I am empty, but I know Your love does not run dry.
So I wait for You.....So I wait for You....

I'm falling on my knees, offering all of me,
Jesus, You're all this heart is living for.

Broken, I run to you, for Your arms are open wide,
I am weary, but I know your touch restores my life.
So I wait for You....So I wait for You.....

I'm falling on my knees, offering all of me,
Jesus, You're all this heart is living for.
I'm falling on my knees, offering all of me,
Jesus, You're all this heart is living for.

Come and Fill #2157

Come and fill our hearts with Your peace,
You alone, oh Lord, are Holy
Come and fill our hearts with Your peace,
A-le-lu—ia.