

Ash Wednesday

February 17th 2021

e-Worship

Joel 2, 13:

*rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.*



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GATHERING

Gathering Hymn # 319 O Lord, through These Forty Days

- 1 O Lord, throughout these forty days
you prayed and kept the fast;
inspire repentance for our sin,
and free us from our past.

- 2 You strove with Satan, and you won;
your faithfulness endured;
lend us your nerve, your skill, and trust
in God's eternal word.

- 3 Though parched and hungry, yet you prayed
and fixed your mind above;
so teach us to deny ourselves
that we may know God's love.

*Text: based on Claudia F. Hernaman, 1838-1898; para. Gilbert E. Doan Jr., b. 1930
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P. Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
who gathers us in the wilderness to redeem us,
anoint us and make us new.

C. Amen.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

**Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.**

Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

**Let me teach your ways to offenders,
and sinners shall be restored to you.**

Amen.

Prayer of the Day

P. Let us pray:

C. 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, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

WORD

First Reading: Joel 2:1-2, 12-13

¹Blow 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 is near—

²a 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.

¹²Yet 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, for he is gracious and merciful,

slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,

and relents from punishing.

A. Word of God, word of life.

C. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 51:1-17

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your | steadfast love;

in your great compassion blot out | my offenses.

²**Wash me through and through | from my wickedness,
and cleanse me | from my sin.**

³For I know | my offenses,

and my sin is ev- | er before me.

⁴**Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil | in your sight;
so you are justified when you speak and right | in your judgment.**

- ⁵Indeed, I was born | steeped in wickedness,
a sinner from my | mother's womb.
- ⁶**Indeed, you delight in truth | deep within me,
and would have me know wisdom | deep within.**
- ⁷Remove my sins with hyssop, and I | shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be pur- | er than snow.
- ⁸**Let me hear | joy and gladness;
that the body you have broken | may rejoice.**
- ⁹Hide your face | from my sins,
and blot out | all my wickedness.
- ¹⁰**Create in me a clean | heart, O God,
and renew a right spir- | it within me.**
- ¹¹Cast me not away | from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spir- | it from me.
- ¹²**Restore to me the joy of | your salvation
and sustain me with your boun- | tiful Spirit.**
- ¹³Let me teach your ways | to offenders,
and sinners shall be re- | stored to you.
- ¹⁴**Rescue me from bloodshed, O God of | my salvation,
and my tongue shall sing | of your righteousness.**
- ¹⁵O Lord, o- | pen my lips,
and my mouth shall pro- | claim your praise.
- ¹⁶**For you take no delight in sacrifice, or | I would give it.
You are not pleased | with burnt offering.**
- ¹⁷The sacrifice of God is a | troubled spirit;
a troubled and broken heart, O God, you will | not despise.

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20b--6:10

^{20b}We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{6:1}As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says,

“At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as

impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

A. Word of God, word of life.

C. Thanks be to God.

Gospel Reading: The holy gospel according to **Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

C. Glory to you, O Lord.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“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.

²“So whenever you give alms, do not 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 have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵“And whenever you pray, do not 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 have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Special Music

Pastoral Message

Dear disciples of Jesus: Grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus. Amen.

The Lectionary says that 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 at baptism. While we journey through Lent to return to God, we have 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.¹

Ash Wednesday is a fundamental stop in our journey with Jesus. It is a necessary stop, a stop to meditate on the implications of being part of humanity, the humankind, that great family of people around the globe that share one thing in common: we are all mortals.

The ashes are the sign that makes us remember our mortality, our vulnerability, our temporality, but at the same time, these ashes make us remember the power of our creator who brought us to life in the beginning from the ground and from the ground will raise us up again on the last day, on the day of our resurrection.

Paul describes very well our existential journey of faith:

as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots,

¹ Sundays and Seasons 2021.

labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God... We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are 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.

Ash Wednesday is exactly that feeling described by Paul, the feeling of living *having nothing, and yet possessing everything*. How can vulnerable mortals like us possess everything? It is clear that for Paul we can proclaim this as a steadfast truth because of Christ. We possess everything in Jesus Christ. We possess Christ humanity, and also, we possess Christ divinity through the presence of the Holy Spirit that lives in us, because we are the temple of the Spirit of God.

That is how Ash Wednesday points to our mortality and also points to our eternal life in Jesus Christ. When we see our mortality we can run and bend our knees in front of the Lord and say: My Lord and my God have mercy.

This is the beginning of Lent, and Lent is a time for reflection, a time for search for the will of God and also a time for spiritual renewal. And this renewal is a work of the Holy Spirit that wants to make us move close to Jesus every instant of our life. And in this journey we also find that Lent is a time of struggle, because Lent is the struggle of the person of faith that discovers the need of a deeper relationship with Jesus and a deeper testimony of faith to the world.

Lent is a good time to live as *having nothing, and yet possessing everything*, because what is really important is not what the world gives us but what we are receiving from God in faith and love. The grace of God is coming to us and

liberating us from the slavery of sin and corruption, from fear and anxiety, from anger and frustration, from isolation and selfishness, and taking us to embrace God's good will and communion, God's love and forgiveness, God's peace and reconciliation.

The world needs to experience this powerful message of Lent, because we need to heal as individuals, as communities and as a nation. The church around the world has a season to describe this journey of repentance, change of paradigm, renewal, forgiveness and healing, that is our Lenten Season.

Lent is a blessing because Lent is something that the world cannot give us. Lent gives us a direct hit of reality. Lent makes us contemplate our sins in all their sinfulness, our soul and being in all our nakedness. Lent helps us to remember that in front of God there is nothing that we can hide, that we are always naked, and that God can see who we really are.

Lent is for this reason a blessing, because we need to remember that we are naked in front of God and that our deep secrets and sins are all visible to God. For this reason, we are invited to receive Lent as the great blessing of walking with Jesus a way to return to the source of our life, to the moment of creation when the voice of God made the darkness disappear and the divine light shone in the universe.

Lent is the great opportunity to analyze our past decisions, our mistakes, our brokenness, our illness, our loneliness, or our desires to be the masters of our own salvation. Lent is here to help us to recall that *we are dust and to the dust we shall return*, but this dust can be the matter to create a new human being in the same way that the first human being was created from the dust of the planet.

It is a great challenge to live *as having nothing, and yet possessing everything*, because our faith declares that in Christ we are completed, that we have eternal life, and that God is our destination.

So, we live by faith, we can only see this through the eyes of our faith, we can only proclaim this with the words and actions of our weakness. And that is exactly why we need Lent, because we forget that our victory is in Christ, that our life is in Christ, that our joy is in Christ and our future is in Christ. It is in Christ that we need to grow, it is in him that we can repair broken relationships and heal the broken hearts, it is in him that we can forget our differences and find unity and mutual respect.

For this reason, Lent is a gift to the whole world, a gift for repentance, for self-evaluation, for accountability, for recommitment, for community building, for evangelism, for mercy, for penance and repentance, and for joy and celebration, –because the prodigal children are returning to the house of the Father of mercies.

Ash Wednesday is just the first step in a six-week journey to remember the stations of the cross and the way of Jesus to calvary for our salvation. Enter into this Lenten experience with open minds and hearts, and also with open hands and arms to receive, to learn, to embrace and to be hugged and loved by God. God through the gospel wants to lead us into new frontiers of love and friendship, taking us to a new horizon of faith, so that we can contemplate the mystery of salvation that is always present and is acting and calling us to action, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

*“At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”*

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

Thanks be to God for the gift of Lent and the call to walk with Christ the way of the cross.

Amen.

Hymn of the Day # 606
Our Father, We Have Wandered

- 1 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 with fear and shame,
 as, distant but compelling,
 we hear you call our name.

- 2 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.

- 3 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.

Text: Kevin Nichols, 1929-2006

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Prayers of Intercession

P. Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

O God, you call your church to be ministers of reconciliation throughout the world. Inspire your church in its proclamation of the gospel and guide its ministries to build up the body of Christ.

O God, you created the earth and all its inhabitants, and you declared that it is good. Protect mountains and valleys, animals and plants, and direct us to be good stewards of all you have made. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

O God, you desire peace. Direct governments and leaders to work for the well-being of all people and raise up advocates to speak and serve on behalf of the downtrodden.

O God, you are our hope in the midst of despair, our help in the midst of sorrow, and our consolation in the midst of affliction. Grant comfort to all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit (*especially*) and support caregivers who attend to all in need. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

O God, you are love, and you call us to love one another.

We give you thanks for the righteous who have died in faith. Inspire us by their example to proclaim your steadfast love. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

INVITATION TO LENT

P. Friends in Christ, today with the whole church we enter the time of remembering Jesus' Passover from death to life, and our life in Christ is renewed.

We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance and for God's mercy. We are created to experience joy in communion with God, to love one another, and to live in harmony with creation. But our sinful rebellion

separates us from God, our neighbors, and creation, so that we do not enjoy the life our creator intended.

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to a discipline that contends against evil and resists whatever leads us away from love of God and neighbor. I invite you, therefore, to the discipline of Lent—self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love strengthened by the gifts of word and sacrament. Let us continue our journey through these forty days to the great Three Days of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Confession and Forgiveness

In these forty days, let us be honest, confess our sin, and receive God's promise of mercy.

Silence is kept for reflection.

P. Fountain of living water,

pour out your mercy over us.

Our sin is heavy, and we long to be free.

**Rebuild what we have ruined
and mend what we have torn.**

Wash us in your cleansing flood.

Make us alive in the Spirit

to follow in the way of Jesus,

as healers and restorers of the world you so love.

Amen.

BLESSING OF ASHES

P. Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth.

May these ashes be a sign of our mortality and penitence, reminding us that only by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ are we given eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

P. Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Silent meditation

P. Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation,

C. that we may show forth your glory in the world.

P. By the cross and passion of your Son, our Savior,

C. bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection. Amen.

SENDING

Blessing

You are what God made you to be:
created in Christ Jesus for good works,
chosen as holy and beloved,
freed to serve your neighbor.
God bless you † that you may be a blessing,
in the name of the holy and life-giving Trinity.

Amen.

Dismissal

P. Go in peace. Remember the poor.

Thanks be to God.

Sending Song # 767 Lord Take My Hand and Lead Me

- 1 Lord, take my hand and lead me
upon life's way;
direct, protect, and feed me
from day to day.
Without your grace and favor
I go astray;
so take my hand, O Savior,
and lead the way.
- 2 Lord, when the tempest rages,
I need not fear;
for you, the Rock of Ages,
are always near.
Close by your side abiding,
I fear no foe,
for when your hand is guiding,
in peace I go.
- 3 Lord, when the shadows lengthen
and night has come,
I know that you will strengthen
my steps toward home,
then nothing can impede me,

O blessed Friend!
So, take my hand and lead me
unto the end.

*Text: Julie von Hausmann, 1825-1901; tr. Lutheran Book of Worship
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Ash Wednesday

Lent begins with a solemn call to fasting and repentance as we begin our journey to the baptismal waters of Easter. As we hear in today's readings, now is the acceptable time to return to the Lord. During Lent the people of God will reflect on the meaning of their baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. The sign of ashes suggests our human mortality and frailty. What seems like an ending is an invitation to make each day a new beginning, in which we are washed in God's mercy and forgiveness. With the cross on our brow, we long for the spiritual renewal that flows from the springtime Easter feast to come.

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