

## **Ash Wednesday**

Wednesday, February 17, 2021

12:00 Noon Interchurch Worship Service

*For centuries, Christians have marked the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday by placing ashes on the foreheads of the faithful. This cross points back to our baptismal anointing, when we were buried with Christ. Ashes are a chilling reminder of our mortality, but because our death is now in Christ, our endings are beginnings. The Lenten disciplines of acts of kindness, prayer, and fasting are tools of discipleship that can lead us to renewal as we bury all that is holding us back from being truly alive. This year, we place the ashes on our own foreheads symbolically, remembering especially our mortality in these perilous times.*

### **GATHERING**

#### **INVITATION TO LENT**

“Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your clothing.

Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.” (Joel 2:12-13)

People of God, each year we remember and celebrate the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which he overcame death and provided for us redemption from sin. Lent is a season of preparation for this celebration, a time of personal and communal renewal and repentance.

Today we begin a journey that will lead us to the cross and finally to the empty tomb. Today we begin with ashes. Ashes are a powerful symbol, reminding us of our mortality and our need for renewal.

We invite you to the disciplines of Lent: self-examination, prayer, meditation upon God’s Word, and fasting during this season of Lent. May God bless us as we walk in the way of our Lord.

## CALL TO WORSHIP

From dust we came, to dust we will return  
**We belong to God.**

We gather in penitence, we go forth in confidence  
**We belong to God.**

At the beginning of Lent, at the dawn of Easter, and at every moment of our lives  
**We belong to God.**

## CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Brothers and Sisters: Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another. Holy and gracious God,

**I confess that I have sinned against you. Some of my sins I know – the thoughts and words and deeds of which I am ashamed – but some are known only to you. In the name of Jesus Christ I ask forgiveness. Deliver and restore me, that I may be in peace.**

God does not pass judgment on us, the judgment we deserve. God creates in us clean hearts and gives a new and right spirit. In the grace of Jesus Christ, we return to God forgiven.

**HYMN: O LORD, THROUGHOUT THESE FORTY DAYS ELW 319**

- 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.
- 4 Be with us through this season, Lord, and all our earthly days,  
that when the final Easter dawns, we join in heaven's praise.

## WORD

### **READING: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17**

A reading from Joel.

*Because of the coming Day of the Lord, the prophet Joel calls the people to a community lament. The repentant community reminds God of his gracious character and asks God to spare the people, lest the nations doubt God's power to save.*

<sup>1</sup>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 is near— <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; <sup>13</sup>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, and relents from punishing. <sup>14</sup>Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God?

<sup>15</sup>Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; <sup>16</sup>gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy.

<sup>17</sup>Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?' "

## **Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21**

*In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commends almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, but emphasizes that spiritual devotion must not be done for show.*

"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. <sup>2</sup>"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. <sup>3</sup>But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. <sup>5</sup>"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. <sup>6</sup>But 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.

<sup>16</sup>"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. <sup>17</sup>But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup>so 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. <sup>19</sup>"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup>but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**HOMILY**

**PASTOR TIMOTHY J. WENGERT**

**HYMN OF THE DAY**    **When I Survey the Wondrous Cross**

1    When I survey the wondrous cross  
      on which the prince of glory died,  
      my richest gain I count but loss  
      and pour contempt on all my pride.

- 2 Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast  
save in the death of Christ, my God;  
all the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to his blood.
- 3 See, from his head, his hands, his feet,  
sorrow and love flow mingled down.  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
or thorns compose so rich a crown?
- 4 Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
that were a present far too small;  
love so amazing, so divine,  
demands my soul, my life, my all.

## **ASHES**

Let us pray.

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. Although we may not receive ashes today, let the cross of our baptism and the ashes of our repentant lives be a sign of our mortality and our true sorrow for sin, reminding us that it is only by the cross of our Lord Jesus that we are given eternal life, in whose name we pray. **Amen.**

Let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

## **SENDING**

Choose this day whom you will serve;  
**We will choose the Living God.**

The road is narrow that leads to life;  
**We will walk in the way of Christ.**

The Gospel is the power of God for salvation  
**For everyone who has faith.**

Create in me a clean heart, O God  
**And put a new and right spirit within me.**