

Ash Wednesday Service



The Lenten journey from the ashes of death to resurrected life begins on the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, which signifies a time to turn around, to change directions, to repent. This first day of Lent reminds us that unless we are willing to die to our old selves, we cannot be raised to new life with Christ. The first step of this journey calls us to acknowledge and confront our mortality, individually and corporately.

Ashes on the forehead are a sign of our humanity and a reminder of our mortality. Lent is not a matter of being good, and wearing ashes is not to show off one's faith. The ashes are a reminder to us of our finite creatureliness. The ashes we wear symbolize the dust and broken debris of our lives, and call us to return to the Lord and seek God's mercy.

Call to Worship and Invocation:

L: Lent is the season we meditate on Jesus' sacrifice.

P: We are reminded that the wages of sin is death, but through Christ we are given the gift of eternal life.

L: Let us pray. We come before you this night, O Lord, seeking your comfort and direction. Send your Spirit to open our hearts to you and bring us to true repentance so our lives may be pleasing in your sight.

P: Receive our prayers like incense and our worship as an evening sacrifice. Through Christ Jesus we pray. Amen

Hymn "Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days" (back cover)

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon

L: Almighty God, you despise nothing you have made and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Forgive us, we pray for we confess we have sinned against you, in thought, word, and deed; and by what we have left unsaid and have not done.

P: Create in us new and contrite hearts, that truly repenting of our sins, and acknowledging our brokenness, we may obtain from you, the God of mercy, full pardon, and forgiveness.

L: In the name of Jesus, our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

*Gloria Patri- [Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.]

Old Testament Scripture: Psalm 103:8-14

New Testament Scripture: Matthew 20:17-19

Ash Wednesday Meditation

Invitation to the Observance of Lent

L: We begin this holy season acknowledging our need for repentance and for God's mercy in forgiving our sins. We begin the journey to Easter with the sign of ashes. This ancient sign speaks of the frailty and uncertainty of human life, and marks this time

Imposition of Ashes

L: Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. May these ashes be for us a sign of our mortality and penitence, and a reminder that only by your gracious gift are we given everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen

Please come forward to receive the ashes if you so desire

Turn from sin and be cleansed by the blood of Christ

Hymn "Abide With Me" - 2 verses (back cover)

Closing

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

P: That we may show forth your glory in the world.

L: By the cross and the passion of our Savior bring us with all your saints to the joy of Christ's resurrection.

P: Lord, hear our prayer.

L: Go in peace and serve the Lord, knowing Jesus has gone before you and calls you to follow him.

P: Thanks be to God. Amen

Psalm 103:8-14 ⁸The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹²as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; ¹⁴for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

Matthew 20:17-19 ¹⁷Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, ¹⁸"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death ¹⁹and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"

PSALM 103:8-14 & MATTHEW 20:17-19

LENT IS A SEASON DURING WHICH BELIEVERS ARE CALLED TO JOURNEY WITH JESUS TO JERUSALEM AND THE CROSS.

WE CALLED ON THIS JOURNEY SO THAT WE MIGHT BETTER EXPERIENCE THE MEANING OF HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

AND WE BEGIN, AS WE MUST, WITH SINCERE REPENTANCE, AS WE ARE INVITED TO REFLECT ALSO ON THE COST OF OUR SALVATION.

THE ACT OF REPENTANCE -OR TURNING FROM SIN BACK TO GOD, REQUIRES FIRST AND FOREMOST, THAT WE HAVE TO ADMIT THAT WE ARE IN FACT SINNERS.

THIS OFTEN IS THE MOST DIFFICULT HURDLE OF ALL FOR SOME PEOPLE TO JUMP OVER.

IT IS DIFFICULT IN THAT MANY TIMES EVEN WHEN WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE DO SIN, WE JUDGE MOST OF OUR TRANSGRESSIONS TO BE ON THE LOWER END OF THE SCALE.

BUT THAT IS NOT THE POINT. GOD WILL NOT JUDGE US BY SAYING: "WELL COMPARED TO "SO AND SO" YOU HAVE BEEN A GOOD PERSON, SO DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT."

GOD TAKES ALL SIN SERIOUSLY BECAUSE EVEN LITTLE SINS ARE ACTS OF REBELLION AGAINST GOD.

AND YET, WE CAN BE COMFORTED TO KNOW GOD DOES NOT TAKE DELIGHT IN PUNISHING SINNERS, BUT RATHER DESIRES US TO TURN BACK TO HIM AND SEEK HIS MERCY.

THANKFULLY, GOD IS NOT LIKE THE ENGLISH KING JAMES II , WHO HAD A REPUTATION FOR BEING AN UNYIELDING JUDGE, AS THE FOLLOWING STORY ILLUSTRATES.

ONE DAY A MAN WHO HAD BEEN ACCUSED OF TREASON HOPELESSLY KNELT BEFORE THE KING, WHO COULD SEE HE WAS TREMBLING BEFORE HIM.

BEFORE PASSING SENTENCE JAMES ASKED THE MAN WHY HE DESPAIRED, ADDING- "DO YOU NOT KNOW IT IS IN MY POWER TO PARDON YOU?"

THE PRISONER QUIETLY REPLIED, "YES, SIRE, BUT IT IS NOT IN YOUR NATURE TO PARDON."

IT IS IN GOD'S NATURE TO PARDON THOSE WHO HUMBLY AND SINCERELY SEEK HIS MERCY.

THE OLD TESTAMENT REVEALS TO US TIME AND TIME AGAIN THAT GOD IS WILLING AND ABLE TO FORGIVE THE SINS OF HIS PEOPLE WHEN THEY REPENT.

AND EVEN AFTER THEY HAD REFUSED TO REPENT AND WERE PUNISHED-THE LORD EVENTUALLY REDEEMED THEM OUT OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR SIN AND RESTORED THEM.

THIS IS NO LESS TRUE FOR ALL PEOPLE TODAY. THERE IS NO RACE, TRIBE, NATION, WHICH IS REFUSED FORGIVENESS AND SALVATION THROUGH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

THE NATURE OF GOD COMPELS HIM TO NOT GIVE UP ON HUMANITY AND TO CONTINUALLY SEEK OUR SINCERE REPENTANCE, SO AS TO FORGIVE.

GOD'S LOVING AND FORGIVING NATURE WAS REVEALED IN JESUS CHRIST, WHO CHOSE TO SUFFER AND DIE FOR OUR SINS AND THE SINS OF OTHERS.

AND IT WAS LOVE THAT MOTIVATED JESUS TO PRAY FROM THE CROSS -HIS DEATH WOULD NOT BE COUNTED AGAINST ANYONE, BUT THAT ALL SHOULD BE FORGIVEN FOR WHAT THEY DID TO HIM.

FORGIVENESS, AS JESUS PROVIDES IT, IS THE GREATEST MANIFESTATION OF LOVE PUT INTO ACTION.

THE APOSTLE PAUL EXPLAINS ITS POWER TO THE EPHESIANS IN HIS LETTER TO THEM.

"IN CHRIST, WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR TRESPASSES, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE WHICH HE LAVISHED ON US."

THE WORD FORGIVENESS AS IT MOST OFTEN APPEARS IN THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT HAS A SIGNIFICANT MEANING. IT MEANS- "TO SEND FROM ONE'S SELF, OR TO PUT AWAY".

GOD, AS THE BIBLE TEACHES, DID THAT AT THE CROSS-WHEN HE PUT OUR SIN ON JESUS, WHO BORE THE FULL IMPACT OF THE PUNISHMENT WARRANTED FOR HUMAN SINS BOTH GREAT AND SMALL.

THIS BRINGS US BACK TO THINKING ABOUT LENT, WHICH OFFERS US A TIME TO REFLECT ON GOD'S CALL TO REPENT.

THEREFORE, LENT IS ALSO A SEASON WHEREIN WE ARE CHALLENGED TO NOT CARRY ON AS USUAL.

BUT INSTEAD, WE ARE CALLED TO CARRY OURSELVES MORE OFTEN TO GOD- WHO AWAITS OUR PRAYERS, AND THE RELATIONSHIP THOSE PRAYERS HELP TO NURTURE.

FURTHERMORE, LENT IS AN OPPORTUNE TIME FOR US TO REFLECT ON OUR DAILY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD, OR THE LACK OF IT.

THUS, IT IS ALSO A GOOD TIME TO BEGIN NEW HABITS OR IMPROVE OUR CURRENT ONES AS WE SEEK TO DRAW NEARER TO GOD.

AND, WHETHER THROUGH PRAYER, WORSHIP, FASTING, ACTS OF SERVICE, BIBLE, OR DEVOTIONAL READINGS LET US DRAW NEARER TO THE LORD.

INDEED, MAY EACH ONE OF US FIND SOME WAY TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP THAT WILL BRING US CLOSER TO GOD-WHO AWAITS OUR COMING WITH OUTSTRETCHED ARMS. AMEN