

First Presbyterian Church  
Rouses Point NY Champlain NY  
March 2, 2022

Pastor -Lori Danielson Organist Sally  
Goddard

### Order of Service-Ash Wednesday

#### CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Jesus came into Galilee calling people to repent.

**P: Jesus came to tell people “The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand.”**

L; He also said “I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly.

**P: We come before You Lord this night, on Ash Wednesday, to hear your word and confess our need for salvation.**

\***Hymn:** “Abide With Me” 2 vs (on back of bulletin)

#### PRAYER OF CONFESSION

L: In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayer as we confess our sinfulness.

**P: Merciful God, we confess we have not followed Jesus with a full commitment of our hearts and lives. Forgive us for forgetting that all life comes from you and to you we will return. Help us to return to the narrow way of obedience and love. In Christ’s name we repent and pray. Amen**

#### ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Choral Response  
(insert)

\*Gloria Patria

#### READINGS AND PROCLAIMING GOD’S WORD

Old Testament: Psalm 51:1-17

Sermon “Ashes”

Prayer: 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. Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation, that we may show forth your glory in the world. By the passion and cross of our Savior, bring us with all your saints to the joy of Christ’s resurrection. Amen

#### IMPOSITION OF THE ASHES:

**“Repent so Jesus may turn your sin to ashes**

#### PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

L: For the church throughout the world, that all who bear the name of

Christ may find true repentance for their sins. , Lord have mercy.

**P: For the nation and people of Ukraine, and all the nations of the world, wherever there is poverty, war, or oppression of human spirit, that all people may repent of the evil they do to one another, let us pray to the Lord. Lord, have mercy.**

L: For the planet Earth, God’s gift to humankind, that we repent of selfish or thoughtless exploitation and tend it with care so that all may share justly in its bounty, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

**P: For the leaders of the nations, that they may work for the common good of all people and repent of arrogant nationalism, let us pray to the Lord. Lord, have mercy.**

L: For our enemies, that we may learn to love them with regard for God’s compassion, forgiving wrongs and seeking reconciliation, let us pray to the Lord. Lord, have mercy.

**P: For those who are sick or in trouble, for the defenseless, the weak, and the poor, that they may find help in time of need, and that the church may heed their cry, let us pray to the Lord. Lord, have mercy.**

L: Loving God, hear the prayers of your people, and answer us according to your will. In our Savior’s name we pray. Amen

Benediction

Old Testament: Psalm 51:1-17

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. 5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. 6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. 7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. 9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. 10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. 14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. 15 Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. 16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. 17 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

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THERE IS A STORY TOLD BY REV. WILLIAM LETTY, ABOUT A PHYSICIAN WHOSE MEDICAL CAREER CONSISTED OF MAKING HOUSE CALLS AT MINER'S SHACKS, COMPANY HOUSES, AND OWNER'S HOMES ALIKE. HIS 80 YEAR-OLD SON RECALLED HOW HIS FATHER WENT TO DELIVER BABIES, OR WENT TO WAIT OUT THE LAST HOURS WITH PATIENTS WHOM HE HAD TREATED FOR YEARS.

WHEN THE STILL PRACTICING DOCTOR WAS HOSPITALIZED IN THE LAST DAYS OF HIS LIFE, HE CALLED HIS SON TO HIS BEDSIDE AND DELIVERED SOME IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS.

THE DOCTOR TOLD HIS SON: "THE FIRST THING YOU MUST DO AFTER I DIE IS TO GO TO THE BOTTOM FILE DRAWER, TAKE OUT ALL THE PAPERS FROM IT AND BURN THEM."

THE SON DID AS HE WAS INSTRUCTED. CONSEQUENTLY, WHEN THE ATTORNEY ASKED ABOUT ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLES FOR THE ESTATE, THE SON HAD TO SAY: "THERE ARE NONE." ALL DEBTS WERE CANCELED...ASHES. WHAT A POWERFUL REMINDER OF WHAT JESUS DOES FOR US.

TODAY IS "ASH WEDNESDAY", THE BEGINNING OF LENT. WE PLACE ASHES ON FOREHEADS AS A SYMBOL OF REPENTANCE. ASHES WERE OFTEN USED IN THIS WAY THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE. THOSE WHO WERE TRULY REPENTANT WORE SACK CLOTH AND ASHES WHILE THEY FASTED.

ALSO, LIKE IN THE ILLUSTRATION ABOUT THE DOCTOR'S BILLS, ASHES ARE ALL THAT IS LEFT IN THE AFTERMATH OF FIRE. WHEN SOMETHING IS COMPLETELY BURNED UP- ASHES ARE THE ONLY EVIDENCE THAT REMAINS OF ITS EXISTENCE.

SYMBOLICALLY, ASHES ARE WHAT CHRIST HAS MADE OF OUR SIN, WHEN WE REPENT, AND CALL UPON OUR SAVIOR, JESUS. JESUS HAS MADE OUR SIN AS TO BE LIKE ASHES. AND WHILE THESE ASHES ARE EVIDENCE OF SIN THEY ARE DISCARDED. THEY ARE CARRIED OUT OF THE SIGHT OF GOD, MUCH LIKE PHYSICAL ASHES THAT MAY BE BLOWN AWAY BY THE WIND.

LENT IS THE TIME OF YEAR IN WHICH THE CHURCH SEEKS TO RAISE A RENEWED AWARENESS OF THE DEPTH AND THE CONSEQUENCES, AS WELL AS THE PAYMENT JESUS MADE FOR OUR SINS. BUT JUST BECAUSE CHRIST TURNS OUR SIN TO ASHES, WE MUST NOT THEREFORE TAKE THEM LIGHTLY- OR MAKE OUR REPENTANCE SUPERFICIAL

LENT HELPS TO REMIND US THAT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS IN WHICH CHRIST CLOTHES US, IS NOT WITHOUT GREAT COST. IT COSTS US A RECOGNITION AND REGRET FOR SIN, AND IT COST JESUS HIS SUFFERING AND DEATH ON THE CROSS.

PSALM 51, THEREFORE, IS AN APPROPRIATE SCRIPTURE TO STUDY THIS EVENING, BECAUSE IT OFFERS A MODEL OF TRUE CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE.

THE MOST NOTEWORTHY ASPECT OF THIS PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND HYMN OF REPENTANCE IS- THAT THE PSALMIST NEVER ATTEMPTS TO MAKE AN EXCUSE FOR HIS TRANSGRESSION.

NOR DOES HE DEMAND ANY SPECIAL RIGHTS, PRIVILEGES, OR SEEK AN ACQUITTAL DUE TO SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES. NOR IS ANY ATTEMPT TO WITHHOLD EVIDENCE OF HIS WRONG DOING ON THE GROUNDS IT WAS UNFAIRLY DISCOVERED.

THERE IS NONE OF THE DEFENSE MANEUVERS ANY GOOD LAWYER WOULD MAKE ON BEHALF OF A CLIENT. INSTEAD, THERE IS SIMPLY AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE PSALMIST'S GUILT. AND EVEN MORE SO, THERE IS A RECOGNITION THAT THE SIN COMMITTED WAS NOT A SOLITARY ACT, NOT A ONE-TIME SLIP UP, BUT RATHER THAT HIS NATURE HAS ALWAYS BEEN PRONE TO SIN, FROM HIS EARLIEST DAYS.

WHAT DAVID SEEKS FROM GOD THEREFORE IS NOT JUSTICE, BUT MERCY, GRACE- ASHES. BUT HIS REQUEST GOES BEYOND ASKING FOR SIMPLE FORGIVENESS- HE DESIRES THAT GOD RECREATE HIM. HE SEEKS FOR THE LORD TO BOTH CLEANSE HIM FROM WITHIN, AND CHANGE HIS NATURE FROM ONE PRONE TO STRAY FROM GOD, TO ONE PRONE TO OBEY THE WILL OF THE LORD.

HERE DAVID EXPRESSES HIS HEARTFELT DESIRE TO TRULY REPENT- TO TURN COMPLETELY TOWARDS GOD. AND YET HE DOES NOT TRY TO AVOID RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS SIN. INSTEAD, DAVID HOPES FOR MERCY AND HELP SO THAT HE MAY BEGIN AGAIN. TO THAT END, THE PSALMIST MAKES A PROMISE TO GOD WHICH SHOWS THAT HIS WISH TO CHANGE IS IN PRACTICE AND NOT MERELY IN PRINCIPLE.

DAVID SAYS: "RESTORE TO ME THE JOY OF YOUR SALVATION AND SUSTAIN IN ME A WILLING SPIRIT. THEN I WILL TEACH TRANSGRESSORS YOUR WAYS AND SINNERS WILL RETURN TO YOU." THUS, THE VOW IS MADE TO SPREAD THE NEWS OF GOD'S MERCIFUL HEART TO OTHERS, SO THEY ALSO MAY REPENT AND RECEIVE FORGIVENESS AND GRACE.

IN THIS SEASON OF LENT, WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PREPARE FOR AN EASTER OF REAL CELEBRATION, BY STRENGTHENING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST.

GOD INVITES US TO FOLLOW THE MODEL OF DAVID- THAT IS TO DO MORE THAN REPENT WE ARE CALLED TO ALSO SEEK THE SPIRIT'S HELP IN RECREATING US, SO WE MAY BETTER LIVE OUT OUR FAITH.

FOR SOME, THIS MAY MEAN THAT LENT IS A TIME WE SHOULD SLOW DOWN, DO MORE REFLECTING ABOUT PRIORITIES OR SEEK IF THERE IS A BETTER USE OF OUR GIFTS. FOR OTHERS, THIS MAY BE THE SEASON TO STOP THINKING AND START DOING.

OR IT MAY BE THE TIME TO GIVE UP CERTAIN HABITS OR PRACTICES THAT ARE NOT HELPFUL TO US AS CHRISTIANS. THE IMPORTANT THING IS- FOR US DO WHATEVER IT IS THE SPIRIT INSPIRES US TO DO, BECAUSE THIS IS ONE WAY WE SHOW OUR SINCERE REPENTANCE TO GOD.

MAY WE ALSO REPENT NOT ONLY BY OUR CONFESSION OF SIN, BUT BY ALLOWING GOD TO RECREATE US ACCORDING TO HIS WILL FOR US.

WE REPENT, BECAUSE WE CAN TRUST THAT GOD WILL- BLOT OUT OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, WASH AWAY OUR INIQUITIES, AND CLEANSE US FROM OUR SIN. FOR IT IS BY THE POWER OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST ALL OF OUR SIN ARE TURNED INTO ASHES. IN CLOSING LOOK TO A VERSE OF THE HYMN "COME THOU FONT OF EVERY BLESSING."

I SHARE IT BECAUSE THE WORDS SUMMARIZE OUR NEED TO REALIZE OUR SINFULNESS AND WELCOME THE GRACE OF GOD THROUGH CHRIST.

"O TO GRACE HOW GREAT A DEBTOR DAILY I'M CONSTRAINED TO BE! LET THAT GRACE NOW LIKE A FETTER, BIND MY WANDERING HEART TO THEE. PRONE TO WANDER, LORD, I FEEL IT, PRONE TO LEAVE THE GOD I LOVE. HERE'S MY HEART, O TAKE AND SEAL IT, SEAL IT FOR THY COURTS ABOVE."

AND SO, AS WE BEGIN THE SEASON OF LENT, LET US ACCEPT THE COSTLY GIFT JESUS OFFERS. LET US TAKE OUR PLACE BENEATH THE CROSS OF JESUS, PLACING ALL OF OUR SINS AT FOOT OF HIS CROSS. AMEN