

Ash Wednesday Worship – A Service of Scripture and Prayer

February 22, 2023

Opening Sentences and Invocation

With fasting, weeping, and mourning,
we return to God.

With honesty and humility,
we acknowledge our humanity.

In accord and in silence,
we offer our prayers.

Eternal Spirit,
in whom we find our treasure,
be with us as we worship you now.
Create clean hearts in us today
that we might be reconciled to you
and forevermore declare your praise.



Prelude

Call to Worship

Return to me with all your heart, says the Lord.

We open our hearts to soulful examination.

Return to the Lord who is gracious and merciful.

We open our hearts to God's steadfast love.

With your hearts open to the Lord, what do you seek?

**Create in us clean hearts, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within us.**

Hymn Son of God, Whose Heart is Peace

GG #425

Son of Gd, whose heart is peace, Son of God, most holy,
to your presence we have come; give us now your love.

Take away our sinfulness, evil that imprisons us;
free us from what troubles us; give our souls release.

Warm our hearts to love you, Lord, you who died to save us;
gather us within your arms, Jesus, on this day.

Passing the Peace

As companions on a Lenten pilgrimage of penitence and seeking, let us greet one another with the Peace of Christ.

The peace of our Lord be with you all. / **And also with you.**

Call to Confession

Now is the time.

Now is the day of salvation.

Now is the beginning of a season of deep breaths,
deep reflection, and deep reckoning.

Trusting in God's grace, now is the time for confession.

Prayer of Confession

**O God, who makes all things new,
new stars, new dust, new life;
take my heart,
every hardened edge and measured beat,
and create something new in me.
I need your newness, God,
the rough parts of me made smooth;
the stagnant stirred;
the stuck, freed;
the unkind, forgiven.
And then, by the power of the Holy Spirit,
I need to be turned toward Love again. Amen.**

Silence is kept

Words of Assurance

God sent Christ into the world, not to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.

God's love endures forever.

God is our strength, a present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though the waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

God's love endures forever.

Prayer for Illumination

Gracious God, our way in the wilderness,
guide us by your Word through these forty days,
and minister to us with your Holy Spirit,
so that we may be reformed, restored, renewed;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A Reading from the Prophets

Joel 2: 1-2, 12-17

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 -- ² a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great a powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come.

¹² Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³ rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. ¹⁴ Who knows whether God will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God? ¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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?' "

Hymn

There's a Wideness in God's Mercy

GG #435

There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea.
There's a kindness in God's justice, which is more than liberty.
There is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than up in heaven.
There is no place where earth's failings have such kindly judgment given.

For the love of God is broader than the measures of the mind.
And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more faithful, we would gladly trust God's Word,
and our lives reflect thanksgiving for the goodness of our Lord.

A Reading from the Gospel

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21

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. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so 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. ⁶ 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.”

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

Ash Wednesday Reflection

Hymn

Though I May Speak

GG #693

Though I may speak with bravest fire, and have the gift to all inspire,
and have not love, my words are vain, as sounding brass, and hopeless gain.

Though I may give all I possess, and striving so my love profess,
but not be given by love within, the profit soon turns strangely thin.

Come, Spirit, come, our hearts control; our spirits long to be made whole.
Let inward love guide every deed; by this we worship and are freed.

Invitation to Observance of the Lenten Discipline and Prayer of Intention

Friends in Christ,
today we enter the season of Lent,
when we repent of our sin and ask God to cleanse our hearts
so that we may prepare for an experience of resurrection
when the Easter season arrives.
We will mark our foreheads with the sign of ashes,
an ancient ritual that speaks of the fragile nature of human life
and marks us as God's creation, made out of dust.

I invite you, therefore, to observe a Holy Lent.
Observe your own heart --
the wounds and prejudice you carry
deep in its recesses.
Observe a practice that speaks to your heart --
prayer, fasting, Scripture reading.
Observe the pain of the world,
and do not shrink away from what you see.
Observe the creative power of love and welcome,
and extend it to others.

Let us join together in offering a Prayer of Intention:

**God of righteousness,
you see the secret acts of our devotion
and know the hidden motives of our hearts.
Confirm in us a spirit of humble obedience,
that we may live as your faithful children.**

**Strengthen this congregation in its work and worship.
Fill our hearts with your self-giving love,
that our voices may speak your praise,
and our lives may conform to the image of your Son.
Nourish us this season with your Word and sacraments
that we may faithfully minister in your name,
and witness to your love and grace for all the world.**

**Hear our prayers, God of grace,
and help us to fulfill them,
working according to your purpose,
in peace, justice, and mercy, in all we do;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Hymn (please remain seated) Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying GG #469

Lord, listen to your children praying.
Lord, send your Spirit in this place.
Lord, listen to your children praying.
Send us love; send us power; send us grace.

Imposition of Ashes

Let us pray:

Almighty God,
you have created us out of the dust of the earth.
May these ashes be to us a sign of our mortality and penitence,
so that we may remember that it is only by your gracious gift
that we are given everlasting life;
through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Please come forward to receive the sign of ashes or signal that you would like to receive ashes in your pew.

Following the Imposition of Ashes

Like those who have gone before
walking this road of Christian faith
this day, we too, wear the mark of the cross.
This mark is, perhaps, more public;
this mark is, perhaps, more confessing –
than other crosses that we wear throughout the year.
It is a mere mark, however gritty,
a dirty smudge which is even more humbling
than other marks, than other crosses that we bear.

But as you wear your mark of the cross from this place this evening,
may you remember all that it represents.

As you wear the mark of the cross,
may you be mindful of ways in which the cross has already marked your life,
and may you find daily, through this Lenten journey,
ways in which God is calling you to share with the world
the love and forgiveness which you have already come to know
in the gritty, humble, dirty, sacred mark of God – the Cross.

As you go to wash this mark of grit and ash from your body,
may you be mindful of the one whose love washes over us;
may you center on the one whose body lived, died, and rose again;
may you focus on the one who offers to remove all stains;
may you breathe a breath of remembrance of the one who gives us life,
and may you, having confessed again what separates you from God's love,
say a word of forgiveness, even to yourself.

Hymn (please remain seated) Sign Us with Ashes, refrain GG #433

Sign us with ashes, merciful God,
children of dust, as to dust we return.
Sign us with ashes, merciful God.
Mark us and make us your own.

Prayer

We are creatures of the sovereign triune God:
mortal and beloved, sinful and redeemed.
From dust we have come, to dust we shall return.
Holy is the Lord.
Let us pray:
Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation,
that we may show forth your glory in the world.
By the cross and passion of our Savior,
bring us with all your saints
to the joy of Christ's resurrection. Amen.

Invitation to the Offering

Jesus says: Where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also.
Let us offer our lives to the Lord
as we bring our tithes and offerings.

Offertory

Prayer of Dedication

Our treasures, O Lord, come from your hand.

Our of your goodness toward us
we have received so much.

Knowing that we came into this life with nothing,
and will go out the same way,
we give of the time, talent, and resources we have now.

Use them, use us, as you will,
for your Son's sake.

We pray this in the name of your Son, our Lord, who taught us to pray
together, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

Hymn

Go with Us, Lord

GG #748

Go with us, Lord, and guide the way
through this and every coming day,
that in your Spirit strong and true
our lives may be our gift to you.

We Are Sent Out

Disciples of Jesus, observe a Holy Lent.
Practice your piety not before others, but before God.
Give generously, but quietly;
pray constantly, but confidentially;
fast with gratitude to God;
and store up that which is in your heart,
for it cannot be taken from you.

The God of reconciliation bless you,
the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you,
and the power of the Holy Spirit strengthen you
this day and forevermore. Amen.



Postlude