

The Season of Lent / Ash Wednesday Service

ITEMS:

Music CD
CD player
Bulletins
Strips of paper
Ashes
Ash cards
Bowl
Match
Communion elements

MUSICAL PRELUDE as people arrive (play CD)

WORDS OF WELCOME

LEADER: Hear the words of Jesus: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Welcome. Today is the first day of the Season of Lent. Lent is Latin for "Spring" - a time for renewal. During Lent we begin our journey toward Holy Week and Easter by looking within ourselves to see how we as individuals and a society fall short of God's vision for us. To the Hebrew people, "sin" meant "missing the mark" or falling short of who we are meant to be. It means separating ourselves from the love of God and others. Today we confess the many ways that we, too, "miss the mark." We seek God's forgiveness and new life.

In church, we confess our sins directly to God and seek forgiveness in our services of worship. We admit our mistakes and learn to live more lovingly together.

In ancient times, people wore a sack cloth and ashes as a symbol of grief and regret. There are many references in the Bible to ashes as a symbol of death, sorrow and remorse.

- o Esther 4:1 "When Mordecai learned about all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on burlap and **ashes**, and went out into the city, crying with a loud and bitter wail."
- o Isaiah 61:3 says, "To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for **ashes**, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the Lord has planted for his own glory."
- o Job 42:1-6 "Then Job replied to the LORD: "I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you. You asked, 'Who

- is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?' It is I--and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me. You said, 'Listen and I will speak! I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.' I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance."
- o Daniel 9:3 "So I turned to the LORD God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting. I also wore rough burlap and sprinkled myself with ashes."
 - o Jesus says in Luke 10:13, "What sorrow awaits you, Korazin and Bethsaida! For if the miracles I did in you had been done in wicked Tyre and Sidon, their people would have repented of their sins long ago, clothing themselves in burlap and throwing **ashes** on their heads to show their remorse."

A tradition started centuries ago, that at the beginning of Lent, ashes would be used as an object lesson to symbolize death and renewal out of death. It was called Ash Wednesday.

In our time this evening, we will use the symbol of ashes (hold up a bowl of the ash mixture and place it down again).

These ashes remind us of the earth from which we came and to which we shall return. It reminds us of new life, just as ashes serve to fertilize the earth and help new plants to grow.

Throughout the history of the church, versions of Lent can be found not only in the Catholic church but also in many Protestant traditions as well. These traditions include giving up something for Lent, using the cross of ashes as object lessons and weekday evening prayer services.

Simply put, Lent is a time of reflection and recommitment, as we ready ourselves for Easter and all that it means in our lives.

CALL TO WORSHIP

LEADER: Now let us worship together in prayer, in meditation, in confession, in the search for forgiveness and new life.

Join with me in this prayer:

Almighty and Everliving God, who, through your Son Jesus Christ, provided a way of redemption for all who repent and turn from sin: Create in us a clean heart and renew a steadfast and willing spirit, that we, acknowledging our sinfulness, may live an upright and holy life by the power of your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, world without end. Amen.

Please join with me in our responsive Call to Worship:

LEADER: We stand in need of God's grace and mercy. Let

us turn to the Lord.

People: May God look upon us with compassion and grant us forgiveness.

LEADER: We stand in need of God's healing power. Let us turn to the Lord.

People: May God's Spirit and redemptive power make us whole and restore us in body, mind and spirit.

LEADER: We stand in need of God's word of hope. Let us turn to the Lord.

People: May God's voice be heard anew proclaiming hope to all who in trust come to our God.

LEADER: We stand in faith before the all-righteous and all-loving God. Let us offer worship and praise.

People: May the worship we bring be to the glory and honor of God.

LEADER: Let's sing the hymn "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus". The worship leader on the CD will tell us when to sing.

HYMN "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" (play song on CD)

THE FIRST READING (Joel 2:2-12)

LEADER: In our first reading the prophet Joel points to the fact that we need to repent of our ways and turn to God. Whatever has happened in the past, God is merciful and willing to forgive.

Now – a reading from the prophet Joel... This is the Word of God:
(Have Volunteer Read text)

PRAYER OF APPROACH (In unison)

LEADER: Join with me as we pray this prayer together:

*Loving God, how great and wonderful You are. You want us to journey with You, to be Your hands and feet and hearts and minds, to bring Your healing love to a hurting world. Be with us now as we look deeply within ourselves, as we seek Your presence and Your guidance, as we begin our Lenten journey this day.
Amen.*

THE SECOND READING (2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10)

(Have Volunteer Read text)

THE GOSPEL READING (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21)

(Have Volunteer Read text)

LEADER: Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ: Since the beginning of the church, Christians have always observed the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection with great devotion. It became one of the great traditions of the church to prepare for these events through serious examination of our spiritual lives through prayer, repentance, and fasting. New believers were prepared for baptism during Lent. Those who were separated from the church through serious sin were reconciled and restored to fellowship. The body of Christ was challenged to seek pardon and absolution for those

areas where sin had found a place, to find reconciliation with God and with each other and to renew their faith.

I invite you, therefore, in Christ, to observe this season of renewal, by self-examination, repentance, prayer, fasting and sacrificial giving; to further your discipline of reading and meditating on the Word of God, and to make a right beginning to walk in newness of life. Therefore, I invite you to kneel (bow) before the Lord, our Creator and Redeemer.

CONFESSION OF SIN

Using 1 John 1:9 as a text, invite the people to pray and ask God to reveal areas of sin and weakness. You instruct the people to write on the blank sheet of paper what God reveals. The papers are folded and placed in a receptacle in the front of the room and burned. Ashes from palm branches are then mixed in with the ashes of the paper. As the papers burn, the leader can explain that just as the list of sins has been consumed never to return, so the Lord has forgiven us and removed our sins from us according to 1 John 1:9.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

LEADER: Once again, let's join together in praying this prayer:

Almighty God, you created us out of the dust of the earth. Grant that these ashes may be to us a reminder of our mortality, humility and repentance, that we may remember that it is only by your gracious gift that we are given everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord (adapted from the Book of Common Prayer)

ASHES

The leader should explain that the ashes are a symbol of sorrow and repentance for sin. They are a sign of intention to die to the old ways and live a new life for Christ. The Leader may say something like...

LEADER: There are many ways to show we are truly sorry and seek to live in God's way. Our words, our actions, and our way of being will tell the tale. To show our repentance and our commitment to new life, we use the symbol of ashes. It reminds us of new life, just as ashes serve to fertilize the earth and help new plants to grow. During this season of Lent, every time you see these ashes, remember your new life in Christ. Please come forward to receive the ashes and let's spend some time in silence reflecting upon the new life we have in Christ.

People come forward to receive the ash card.

SONG "At the Foot of the Cross" by Kathryn Scott (play song on CD)

Once everyone has received the cards, play "At the Foot of the Cross" as a time for reflection and self-examination.

PRAYER (in unison)

LEADER: Let's pray this prayer together:
Loving and merciful God, we have made our honest confessions before you and before one another. We thank You for Your forgiveness and for your healing. We pray for Your continued forgiveness and healing in a hurting world. May nothing separate us from You as we follow Jesus during this Lenten journey. Amen.

LEADER: Let's sing the hymn "Just As I Am" as we prepare for communion.

HYMN "Just As I Am" (play song on CD)

COMMUNION

The service will continue with communion, following a standard form. Observe silence during communion to express the sober nature of the memory observed.

LEADER: Jesus said, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Matthew 11:28-29).

The Lord has prepared his table for his church. All who love him and trust in him alone for their salvation are now invited to come to the table of the Lord.

People come forward to receive the elements.

LEADER: Take, eat, remember and believe that the body of the Lord Jesus Christ was given for the complete remission of all our sins.

LEADER: Take, drink, remember and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

BENEDICTION

LEADER: Let us go from this place, knowing that we are not alone on our journey. God is with us! Let us go, seeking new life in Christ, and with the peace of Christ in our hearts. Amen.

[OPTIONAL]

ASHES AND ANOINTING

[This is optional] While the imposition of ashes dates back to the eleventh century, more recent liturgies make this optional, referencing Jesus' words in Matthew 6:16-18 concerning penitence.

The leader may want to explain before the people come forward that the ashes are a symbol of sorrow and repentance for sin. They are a sign of intention to die to the old ways and live a new life for Christ. The Leader may say something like...

LEADER: There are many ways to show we are truly sorry and seek to live in God's way. Our words, our actions, and our way of being will tell the tale. To show our repentance and our commitment to new life, we now invite you to receive the symbol of ashes. This symbol will be in the shape of a cross, and you can choose to have it placed on your forehead or on the back of your hand. If you choose to have it placed on your hand, just simply hold out your hand when you come forward. The ashes, a symbol of how sorry we are, have been mixed with oil, a symbol of God's healing.

Should the imposition of ashes be done, the following words can be used when people come forward:

LEADER: Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. Repent and believe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.