

Ash Wednesday February 17, 2021

Welcome and announcements please join me next week on-line for the Lenten series “Created for Community”.

Confession and Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God, the keeper of the covenant, the source of steadfast love, our rock and our redeemer. **Amen.**

God hears us when we cry and draws us close in Jesus Christ. Let us return to the one who is full of compassion.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Fountain of living water,

pour out your mercy over us. Our sin is heavy, and we long to be free.

Rebuild what we have ruined and mend what we have torn.

Wash us in your cleansing flood. Make us alive in the Spirit to follow in the way of Jesus, as healers and restorers of the world you so love. Amen.

Beloved, God’s word never fails. The promise rests on grace: by the saving love of Jesus Christ, the wisdom and power of God, your sins are † forgiven, and God remembers them no more. Journey in the way of Jesus. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and ever-living God, you hate nothing you have made, and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and honest hearts, so that, truly repenting of our sins, we may receive from you, the God of all mercy, full pardon and forgiveness through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Because of the coming day of the LORD, the prophet Joel calls the people to a community lament. The repentant community declares that God is gracious and asks God to spare the people lest the nations doubt God’s power to save.

¹Blow 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—

²a 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.

¹²Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

¹³rend 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.

¹⁴Who 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?

¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly;

¹⁶gather 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.

¹⁷Between 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?'" "

Psalm 51:1-17

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

²**Wash me through and through from my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin.**

³For I know my offenses, and my sin is ever before me.

⁴**Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are justified when you speak and right in your judgment.**

⁵Indeed, I was born steeped in wickedness, a sinner from my mother's womb.

⁶**Indeed, you delight in truth deep within me, and would have me know wisdom deep within.**

⁷Remove my sins with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be purer than snow.

⁸**Let me hear joy and gladness; that the body you have broken may rejoice.**

⁹Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my wickedness.

¹⁰**Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.**

¹¹Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

¹²**Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.**

¹³Let me teach your ways to offenders, and sinners shall be restored to you.

¹⁴**Rescue me from bloodshed, O God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness.**

¹⁵O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

¹⁶**For you take no delight in sacrifice, or I would give it. You are not pleased with burnt offering.**

¹⁷The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; a troubled and broken heart, O God, you will not despise.

Gospel: 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.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“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.

³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

⁴so 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.

⁶But 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.

¹⁶“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. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,

¹⁸so 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;

²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Sermon

We join together for Ash Wednesday to mark the beginning of the Lenten season. Ash Wednesday is considered the first day of the Lent. Early Lenten practices were different than today. People sometimes dressed in sackcloth, a scratchy material often made of goat hair and poured ashes over their entire bodies. The sackcloth and ashes were practices of repentance in ancient Hebrew scriptures. In the books of Job, Jonah, Daniel and even Ester this ritual was done as a demonstration of extreme mourning, grief and repentance. By the 11th century putting ashes on the foreheads of the faithful was the new practice of the Roman Catholic Church.

The main theme of Ash Wednesday for Christians is repentance. We are approaching the Holy Week readings of Christ Jesus’ trial, crucifixion and resurrection and we know that the violent way Jesus died for us and the miraculous resurrection is incomprehensible. We confess that we are mortal, sinful, undeserving and in need of God’s mercy. We are dust and to dust we shall return (Genesis 2:19).

We miss gathering and having ashes put on our foreheads in the shape of the cross. We miss confessing together in community. Although we miss these rituals, yet we are gathered here in a different way and we receive the forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus.

There have been many debates in Christian circles as to whether you can put on your own ashes. Ashes are a ritual and not a sacrament of the Holy Spirit so you can do you if you have ashes. If you do not have any ashes, you could make the sign of the cross with water on your forehead to remember that you are claimed as a child of God by baptism. In this year with continued concerns of the Covid 19 pandemic, some have said that your mask is a symbol of sacrifice. It could be a good symbol, I think.

During Lent, the practices of giving generously, prayer and fasting continue to be encouraged. Fasting means to eat less such as 1 meal a day. There is a long history of fasting. In modern times many people give up something that is a sacrifice such as meat, desserts or some bad habit. This ritual is designed to remind us of Jesus suffering.

Matthew 6 is perfect yet dreadfully odd for Ash Wednesday. Jesus tells us not to practice our piety visibly (verse 1), and not to disfigure our faces but to wash them (verse 16)—on the very day that we usually wear ashes on our faces for the day. In today’s gospel of Matthew, Jesus is addressing the hypocrisy of those people who made a living by acting out public appearances of prayer and sacrifice to scam others passing by, Jesus goes on to tell the audience and all of us that we should not store up things, and treasure things other than God. During Lent we also focus on where our treasure is. Our treasure is our faith and not our things.

Ash Wednesday confronts us with our limits as human beings—our sinfulness, mortality, vulnerability. This liturgical day invites us all to reflect on moments when we have been reminded of the deeper truths about ourselves.

Ash Wednesday is a time to remember the importance of your faith. When has your faith been the most important to you? What story of faith can you share? Our stories help ground our experience of Ash Wednesday and renew our commitment to walking with Christ through Lent.

Ashes were the main ingredient in many ancient soaps and were often used in ritual cleansings. Numbers describes ritual cleansing with ashes (Num. 19:9-10), which the book of Hebrews then relates to the cleansing power of Christ’s blood (Heb. 9:13-14).

We may not have ashes on our foreheads today however we do know who we belong to and what Christ did for us on the cross. So right now, I ask you to trace the sign of the cross on your forehead as we say: “Create in me a clean heart, O God” “Create in me a clean heart, O God” Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence. O God, you call your church to be ministers of reconciliation throughout the world. Inspire your church in its proclamation of the gospel and guide its ministries to build up the body of Christ. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, you created the earth and all its inhabitants, and you declared that it is good. Protect mountains and valleys, animals and plants, and direct us to be good stewards of all you have made. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, you desire peace. Direct governments and leaders to work for the well-being of all people and raise up advocates to speak and serve on behalf of the downtrodden. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, you are our hope in the midst of despair, our help in the midst of sorrow, and our consolation in the midst of affliction. Grant comfort to all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit and support caregivers who attend to all in need. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, you are love, and you call us to love one another. Accompany with your grace those journeying toward baptism and call us all to repentance as we prepare to celebrate Christ's death and resurrection. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, you are our life and our salvation. We give you thanks for the righteous who have died in faith. Inspire us by their example to proclaim your steadfast love. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Offering Prayer Faithful God, you walk beside us in desert places, and you meet us in our hunger with bread from heaven. Accompany us in this meal, that we may pass over from death to life with Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Gathered into one by the power of the Holy Spirit we pray as Jesus taught ...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Invitation to Communion

Jesus draws the whole world to himself. Come to this meal and be fed.

Holy Communion Together

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. You call your people to cleanse their hearts and prepare with joy for the paschal feast, that, renewed in the gift of baptism, we may come to the fullness of your grace.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me. For as often as we eat of this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Take your bread/cracker	The body of Christ given for you
Take you juice/wine/water	The blood of Christ shed for you

The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in His grace.

Prayer after Communion

God of steadfast love, at this table you gather your people into one body for the sake of the world. Send us in the power of your Spirit, that our lives bear witness to the love that has made us new in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Blessing

You are what God made you to be: created in Christ Jesus for good works, chosen as holy and beloved, freed to serve your neighbor.

God bless you **✠** that you may be a blessing, in the name of the holy and life-giving Trinity. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Share the good news.

Thanks be to God.