**Wednesday, February 17th, 2021**

**Scripture Reading: Isaiah 58:6-9**

**Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

A young man once visited the great German preacher Martin Luther

          to ask for his advice.

He said that he was constantly plagued by wrongful desires

          and lustful thoughts and did not know what to do.

Martin Luther’s reply was typically blunt and to the point.

He said, “You can’t stop birds flying to and fro in the air,

          but you can stop the birds from nesting in your hair!”

Temptations come, we make mistakes, we disobey God,

            but we don't have to let these things get the best of us.

We can turn our backs on temptations, we can try to watch our behavior

          and make fewer mistakes in our lives.

And God is always present with us, loving us, forgiving us,

          and helping us to live His way.

Today is Ash Wednesday and so we begin the season of Lent.

We begin our Lenten journey by receiving the mark of ashes in the form of a cross on our foreheads, a sign of death, and a sign of life.

For many Lent is a time of giving something up – like a sacrifice –

          reminding us of the significance of Lent.

Others decide to take on some new task, such as more time spent in prayer,

          or reading the Bible a bit more each day.

Some will take a closer look at the Ten Commandments, or Psalms, or

          read the parables of Jesus.

Some look for new ways to help others during this season by:

          noticing when a neighbor could use a helping hand,

          or remembering and thanking those who have helped us in the past.

These are small practices which make the season more meaningful

          and bring us a bit closer to God.

Our readings tonight help us to remember we are here to love and help

          our neighbors in any way we can.

As we follow this teaching, God's light begins to shine in the darkness

          of the world around us.

Yet God never expects us to follow His ways all by ourselves.

Every time we call to Him for help, He answers: "Here I Am."

Lent urges us to practice our faith – every day, in any way we can.

We can begin by taking a closer look at how we act,

          and try to follow the example of Jesus.

We will never be perfect, but we can be better than we have been.

We practice faith for the sake of a world broken by sin, yet redeemed by grace.

The season of Lent helps us to be ready to understand all Jesus did for us.

As we struggle to live God's way, we begin to prepare ourselves

          for the wonderful celebration of Easter.

AMEN