

Jacob Hanson  
03-6-2019  
Lenten Service  
Sermon Title: "Ash Wednesday"

Prelude  
UMH #559 "Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation"  
Responsive Reading: UMH #785-786 "Psalm 51:1-17"  
Apostle's Creed  
Matthew 4:1-11  
Sermon: "Ash Wednesday"  
Lord's Prayer  
Sermon Song: TFWS #2266 "Here Is Bread, Here Is Wine"  
Offering  
Doxology: "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow" UMH #95  
Communion/Marking with Ashes

Questions:

- 1) Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. What marks the end?
- 2) Ash Wednesday is based around the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness. What does this time in the wilderness mark in the life of Christ?
- 3) The Lenten season has had a long history of fasting. Whether it be from food, technology, tobacco, or something else it has been a great opportunity to give up something for the duration of Lent in order to devote more time to the Lord. With that being said, do you plan on giving up anything during Lent? What and why?

Memory Verse: Matthew 4:4 "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

Lenten Challenge: Consider fasting this week from something you normally use or enjoy, and devote that time to the Lord.

Pastor Jacob Hanson  
03/6/2019

### **Opening Prayer**

Good evening, welcome here to the combined Ash Wednesday Service between both Kasson and Pleasant Corners United Methodist Churches. I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and it is with great joy that tonight we enter the Lenten Season.

Lent is an important time of the year for us as Christians. Beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on Easter Sunday, it is a forty day long remembrance and celebration of our Savior's life. While the Christian experience always begins and ends with Jesus, it is during this time that we are able to really dig into who Jesus was... and is. Over the course of these forty days we are going to cover a lot of different aspects of Jesus's life. We will look at His miracles, His teachings, His death and resurrection, the transfiguration, etc. Today, though, we begin by talking about the beginning of Jesus's ministry. We begin the Lenten season by talking about Jesus's time spent in the desert. This sets the tone for the rest of Lent.

We read this evening from Mathew 4:1-11 about Jesus's time spent in the wilderness. In the land of Israel, both today and back then, this would have been the desert. The seclusion the desert wilderness brings is a big part of the reason we see Jesus going there. It is something that all of the great prophets experienced. Elijah spends forty days in the wilderness seeking out the Lord, Moses is driven into the wilderness before he encounters God in the burning bush, and John the Baptist comes out of this wilderness preaching a Gospel of repentance to mark the Lord's coming. Jesus, much like these men, has His own desert wilderness experience. During this time we read that He fasted for forty days, that He had nothing to eat. This idea of fasting, of seclusion, is a major one in regards to Lent. The reason Lent lasts forty days, by the way, is because it is in homage to Jesus's time spent in the wilderness. But why does Jesus do this? The answer is simple, it is preparation for what is coming ahead.

In the wilderness, in seclusion, Jesus does away with most of the comforts of life to ready Himself for ministry. As was already mentioned, this was a common place for prophets and holy men to separate themselves in order to draw close to the Lord. It is important that Jesus looks like who He is... a holy man, a prophet, the Messiah. Again, while this is a small thing for God in all of His glory, Jesus is fully man as well, so this preparation is necessary. So He enters the wilderness, giving up the creature comforts of life not because they are bad, but to help

better focus on the Lord. For us as we enter Lent, part of the tradition of this season is to prepare ourselves for what comes at the end... the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is also a convenient time for us to prepare ourselves for the Lord's work and rededicate ourselves to Him. Part of this has been fasting.

In the desert Jesus fasts for forty days from food. The proper way to approach a fast is dedicate to pray and study of God's word that time normally spent doing whatever is being fasted from to the Lord. A fast doesn't also necessarily mean going without food for an extended period of time. You can fast from social media, or video games, or listening to the radio in the car, or just about anything else. The main deal when it comes to fasting is to devote that time spent doing that normal activity to prayer and to fast for a purpose. Giving up chocolate just to not eat chocolate for the duration of Lent, when you never pray about it and don't have a set goal in mind, means nothing. But if you give up chocolate in order to remind yourself to pray for someone in your family who is hurting, and you do that when you would normally have that piece of candy, then you are fasting properly. Going back to Jesus, it is here in the wilderness, after having fasted nearly to the point of starvation, that the devil then comes to tempt Jesus... and Satan does this with scripture. This is our second portion tonight on Ash Wednesday, understanding temptation and how to fight it.

An important fact that should not be lost on you is that Satan is incredibly intelligent. He is very smart, and he knows scripture. We should take a cue from Jesus in how to combat the devil's advances. Jesus doesn't do it with sheer will, or anger, or strength... He combats the advances of the devil with scripture. He knows the truth, and the truth keeps Him from the temptations. You may be wondering how it is that Jesus, God in human flesh, could be tempted. It seems silly that the Creator of everything would put Himself in such a situation, and that He could even be tempted by these things that Satan offers. But as we go throughout the temptations of Jesus, remember that He is not only fully God, but also fully man. Jesus here is a human being in every way that you and I are. God may not be able to be tempted, but man surely can be. If you are confused about how Jesus can be fully God and fully man, join the club. That has been the biggest divider of the church for the last 2000 years. As a shameless plug for the rest of the Lenten services on Wednesdays and Sundays, know that we will be talking much more in depth on this topic... so show up. Moving back to our scripture for this evening, we see how it is that the devil tempts Christ. We should take note, because we are often tempted in the same way.

Satan starts off by offering Jesus the thing that He has been fasting from, bread, as the first temptation. After forty days and nights without eating anything, in verse two we read that Jesus is hungry. Duh, of course He is hungry! The devil tries subtly to get Jesus to get Jesus to forget why He is fasting, why He is out there in the wilderness in the first place, and to get Him to use His power in a way that isn't glorifying the Lord. Jesus, knowing His scripture, states that man does not live on bread alone... but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. We should take note, because this is how Satan often tempts us, by offering us something that

seems innocuous, something that seems ok... but doesn't bring us closer to the Lord. It is like substituting a wholesome meal for greasy fast food. It tastes good, but the nutrition isn't there. Following this temptation, Satan then tries to con Jesus through a misquote of scripture.

The devil brings Jesus to the top of the temple in Jerusalem, likely the tallest building in Jerusalem at the time. Verse six reads "And he said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You; and on their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'" Satan quotes scripture from the book of Psalms, Psalm 91. It is a Psalm promising security and safety for those who trust in the Lord... and it is a totally taken out of context by the deceiver. (I am guessing you can figure out how he got that name.) That Psalm says nothing about putting the Lord to the test, it is about the protection that comes from trusting in the Lord. Jesus, knowing who is speaking to Him and knowing His scripture, quotes back from Deuteronomy 6:16 that we are not to put our God to the test. Thinking about this in our lives, how often have you heard it said that "I asked God for this, He didn't give it to me, so now I don't believe." How often have you heard that argument? Or how often have you heard the argument that if God is real, why doesn't He just show up here and now and prove it? One answer, is that we are not to put God to the test. The Lord isn't a dancing puppet who does stuff for our amusement, and He doesn't answer prayers just because. He does plenty to prove that He is here with us, if we pay attention, and make no mistake that He cares for us, but putting God to the test is not the proper way to interact with our Creator. Just think about it... you don't put the airbags in your car to the test with an intentional car crash, and you don't put the your flu shot to the test by having a sick person cough in your face. You don't put the Lord your God to the test, but you can rely upon Him. The final temptation of Jesus is an appeal to power, and here too we see a similarity in the way Satan often tempts us today.

The final temptation of Jesus that we read about during His forty days in the wilderness is an appeal to power made by Satan. We read that Jesus was taken up to the top of a high mountain and presented with all the kingdoms of the world by the devil. Everything Jesus could have humanly wanted would be given to Him if only He would bow down and worship Satan. In many ways this is the temptation that most often gets in our way. This is the temptation that works the best it seems in our context, in our world. You may think that you have never encountered this temptation, trading worship for earthly power and pleasure, but you have. Satan is very crafty, and he doesn't even have to come close to offering the world for many of us to turn away from worshipping our Lord alone. Think about it, substitute out the kingdoms of the world for a job promotion, or the guy/girl of your dreams, or a new boat, or a quiet and peaceful life with no worries. Many times we are offered this fools gold by the world if we would but cheat a little on our taxes, or tell a couple white lies here and there about our productivity at work, or if we would only tithe a little less of our time, gifts and talents to the Lord. Satan knows our weak points, and he is quick to offer something we want in exchange for something that we desperately need. If you are wondering how to overcome a temptation like

this, Jesus's response rings true: "Go Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" Following all of the tests and temptations, Jesus is then ministered to by angels, and from there He begins His ministry to the world. After all that trial and temptation, after making it through that preparatory period, Jesus then embarks on the journey that will lead Him to the cross, and subsequently to our salvation.

To boil it down to the nitty-gritty, in looking at the basis for Lent, there are two major things that we should take away. The first is that Lent is a time of preparation and fasting, just as Jesus did it. The second is that we have to remember how our enemy works. Be prepared to get attacked this season, Satan certainly doesn't want you to have a Lent that brings you closer to the Lord. Let us pray.

### **Closing Prayer**