



ASH WEDNESDAY BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Lent begins with a solemn call to fasting and repentance as we begin our journey to the baptismal waters of Easter. During Lent the people of God will reflect on the meaning of their baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. The sign of ashes suggests our human mortality and frailty. What seems like an ending is really an invitation to make each day a new beginning, in which we are washed in God's mercy and forgiveness. From this solemn liturgy, the church goes forth on its journey to the great baptismal feast of Easter.

In a society that often avoids apology and denies death Christians gather to confess their sins and face their mortality. Tradition says that when caught in his sin, King David composed Psalm 51, and it now accompanies our Lenten journey back to forgiveness at the font.

Psalm 51:1-18

page 239

The Psalm concludes with:

Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit:

As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

INVITATION TO THE LENTEN DISCIPLINE

P. Friends in Christ ... Jesus' death and resurrection.

Because this day is about sin, we confess both to God and one another. Because this day is about death, we recognize the many ways our attitudes and actions lead to death for ourselves and others. Our confession is cast in the plural because we assist each other in our confession. Only supported by the whole community can we face the truth of our failings.

CONFESSION OF SIN

P. Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

The people keep silence for self-examination.

P. Most holy and merciful God,

C. we confess to You and to one another,
and before the whole company of heaven,
that we have sinned by our fault,

by our own fault, by our own most grievous fault,
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done and by what we have left undone.

P. We have not loved You with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven.

C. Have mercy on us, O God.

P. We have shut our ears to Your call to serve as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved Your Holy Spirit.

C. Have mercy on us, O God.

P. Our past unfaithfulness, the pride, envy, hypocrisy, and apathy that have infected our lives, we confess to You.

C. Have mercy on us, O God.

P. Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people, we confess to You.

C. Have mercy on us, O God.

P. Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to share the faith that is in us, we confess to You.

C. Have mercy on us, O God.

P. Our neglect of human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty, we confess to You.

C. Have mercy on us, O God.

P. Our false judgments, our uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us, we confess to You.

C. Have mercy on us, O God.

P. Restore us, O God, and let Your anger depart from us.

C. Hear us, O God, for Your mercy is great.

Like the ancient Israelites, we enact our sorrow by marking our forehead with ashes. The palms used last year to celebrate Christ's triumphant entry to Jerusalem are now the ashes of our confession. We admit that we will return to dust, we think ahead to our own funeral. But the ashes trace exactly where the water of our baptism began our life in Christ. Now and forever, we are God's children.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

P. Almighty God, You have created us out of the dust of the earth. Bless these ashes and those who receive them. May this sign of our mortality and penitence remind us that only by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ are we given eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

C. Amen.

Those who desire to receive ashes may come forward. After all have returned, please rise as we conclude.

HYMN (*sung during imposition of ashes*)

#309 (grn)

P. Accomplish in us, O God, the work of Your salvation,
C. **that we may show forth Your glory in the world.**

P. By the cross and passion of Your Son, our Savior,
C. **bring us with all Your saints to the joy of Christ's resurrection.**

P. Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life.

C. **Amen.**

GREETING

P. From our God Who loves us with an everlasting love, Who brings forth a new creation in Christ, Who leads us by the Spirit in the wilderness: Grace and abundant mercy be with you all.

C. **And also with you.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P. Let us pray. Gracious God, out of Your love and mercy You breathed into dust the breath of life, forming us to serve You and our neighbors. Create in us new and honest hearts, so that, truly repenting of our sins, we may receive from You full pardon and forgiveness, and strengthen us to face our mortality with confidence in the mercy of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: **Isaiah 58:1-12**

God reminds the Israelites (and us) that outward observance is no substitute for genuine fasting that results in acts of justice, such as feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and clothing the naked. Then God's light will shine on the earth and the glory of God will transform dry places with springs of water.

Shout out, do not hold back!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!
Announce to My people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.

²Yet day after day they seek Me
and delight to know My ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of Me righteous judgments,
they delight to draw near to God.

³"Why do we fast, but You do not see?"

Why humble ourselves, but You do not notice?"
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day,
and oppress all your workers.

⁴Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.

Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.

⁵Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?

Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?

Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?

⁶Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,

to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,

and to break every yoke?

⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;

when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

⁸Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;

your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

⁹Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and He will say, Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,

¹⁰if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,

then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

¹¹The LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,

and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,

like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.

¹²Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;

you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING: 2 Corinthians 5:20b--6:10

Each day, each Lent, is the acceptable time in which we are called to be reconciled to God and such reconciliation is worth more than all other possessions.

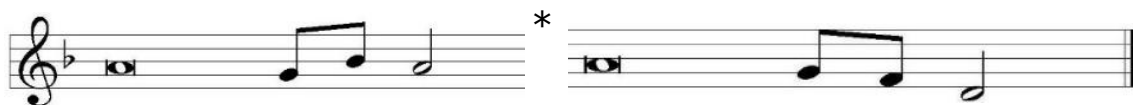
We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake He made Him to be sin Who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. ^{6:1}As we work together with Him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For He says, “At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

The Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

Lent gives us forty days to return to the font of forgiveness and life. We embark on this journey by receiving the gospel.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION



Return to the | Lord your God,

Who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in | steadfast love. (Joel 2:13)

HOLY GOSPEL: ST. MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-21

From this excerpt from the Sermon on the Mount come the three classic disciplines of Lent: giving alms, praying and fasting. These behaviors are signs that what we treasure most is God, rather than the stuff of our selves.

C. (Spoken) **Glory to You, O Lord.**

[Jesus said to the disciples:] “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.”

C. (Spoken) Praise to You, O Christ.

SERMON

HYMN Savior, When in Dust to You #91 (grn)

We will use the Apostle's Creed and "Create in Me..." throughout Lent. The Apostles' Creed is the baptismal creed, the confession of faith made for us at baptism, and by us when we renew or affirm our baptisms. The song, taken from Psalm 51, reminds us of our Lenten discipline and asks God's help in keeping it, "uphold me with Your free Spirit."

THE APOSTLES' CREED

page 85

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

SHARING THE PEACE

OFFERING/ OFFERTORY *Create in Me A Clean Heart*

page 96

OFFERTORY PRAYER

P. God our provider,

C. You have not fed us with bread alone, but with words of grace and life. Bless us and these Your gifts, which we receive from Your bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

page 88

THE SANCTUS (HOLY, HOLY, HOLY)

page 89

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

P. Blessed are You ... pouring out His life for the world.

C. Amen.

P. In the night in ... and proclaim the mystery of faith.

C. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

P. Gracious God ... both now and forever. Amen

LORD'S PRAYER

page 91

AGNUS DEI (LAMB OF GOD)

page 92

POST-COMMUNION SONG

On my heart imprint Your image, Blessed Jesus, king of grace,
 That life's troubles nor its pleasures Ever may Your work erase;
 Let the clear inscription be Jesus crucified for me
 Is my life, my hope's foundation All my glory and salvation!

The closing prayer summarizes the intent of Ash Wednesday and Lent: for forty days we will focus on returning to our Baptism by giving alms, fasting from self-indulgence, finding our treasure only in Christ. It is good that we have forty days to work on all this.

POST COMMUNION PRAYER

P. Merciful God, accompany our journey through these forty days. Renew in us the gift of baptism, that we may provide for those who are poor, pray for those in need, fast from self-indulgence, and above all that we may find our treasure in the life of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C. Amen.

✠ SENDING ✠

BLESSING

P. Almighty God the Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth and forevermore. C. Amen

CLOSING HYMN *Bless Now O God, the Journey*

Adapting the conclusions of five of the New Testament letters, this lengthy dismissal sends us out for our forty days of baptismal renewal.

DISMISSAL

P. Go forth into the world to serve God with gladness;
 be of good courage;
 hold fast to that which is good;
 render to no one evil for evil;
 strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak;
 help the afflicted; honor all people;
 love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

C. Amen.

Pruned and Growing

While trees are in their dormant period it is a season for cutting them back or pruning them. Rather than hurting the trees, pruning—when done correctly—can improve the shape, future growth, and fruit-bearing potential of a tree.

Lent can also be a time for pruning that which is misshapen in our lives. Lent can be a time for us to get rid of those things that may be preventing spiritual growth. We trim things back and get closer to the vital trunk and root system that is our source. Lent is a time, then, for getting back to basics, for getting back to those things that truly do sustain and nourish us.

We rightly begin this season by returning to God's word and to the Lord's supper that nourishes and sustains us as no other meal can. We return today to another fundamental source: baptism. Many of us will receive an ashen cross upon our foreheads that retraces the place where we were marked and sealed with Christ's cross on our first day as God's holy child. At baptism we were told that we are dead to sin but alive in Jesus Christ.

We are reminded today that we are dust, and that one day we will all return to a place where only God will finally have control over us. So we are dead, but we are also even more alive in Christ. This is the great mystery of our faith. This is the great news we have to share with the world: that even at our worst, we are saved and strengthened by God. Even in our most dormant states, God is making us ready to achieve our fullest possible growth.

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