

Blessing the Dust A Blessing for Ash Wednesday

All those days you felt like dust, like dirt, as if all you had to do was turn your face toward the wind and be scattered to the four corners or swept away by the smallest breath as insubstantial—

Did you not know what the Holy One can do with dust?

This is the day we freely say we are scorched.

This is the hour we are marked by what has made it through the burning.

This is the moment we ask for the blessing that lives within the ancient ashes, that makes its home inside the soil of this sacred earth.

So let us be marked not for sorrow.

And let us be marked not for shame.

Let us be marked not for false humility or for thinking we are less than we are but for claiming what God can do within the dust, within the dirt, within the stuff of which the world is made, and the stars that blaze in our bones, and the galaxies that spiral inside the smudge we bear.

—Jan Richardson

Sunday, March 1st

- * 8:30am Worship
- * 9:30am Coffee Hour
- * 10:30am Worship
- * 12:00pm Adult Initiation Meeting

Monday, March 2nd

- * 9:30am Woodland Park Service

Tuesday, March 3rd

- * 12:00pm Sisters at Grounds & Goodies
- * 1:30pm Visio Prayer in Prayer Chapel
- * 2:30pm R & R - in Prayer Chapel
- * 6:00pm Grief Support—LL CE
- * 8:00pm AA—LL CE

Wednesday, March 4th

- * 7:00am Good Guys Bible Study—McOttos
- * 8:00am Lutheran Men in Mission
- * 5:00pm — Lenten Worship w/portrayals
- * 5:30pm-6:30pm—Lenten Supper
- * 6:00pm WD4
- * 6:45pm Lenten Worship w/portrayals
- * 7:45pm Mission Trip Meeting LL CE

Thursday, March 5th

- * 1:30pm Anamosa Care Center Service

Church Office Hours: Typically church staff are in the building Monday - Friday. **Lois' office hours** are: Mon. & Th 9-2; Tue. 12:30–5:30; Wed. 9-5; Fri 9-12. Outside these hours call ahead to see if someone is here.

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Wednesday, February 26th Ash Wednesday

Noon Greeters: Ken & Pam Humpal

Noon Reader: Lois Ocenosak

Noon PowerPoint: Darcie Tenley

6:00 pm Greeters: WD4 Students

6:00 pm Reader: WD4 Students

6:00 pm PowerPoint: WD4 Students

Sunday, March 1st 8:30 a.m.

Ushers: Tom Sabotta & Sherri Evans

Reader: Tom or Sherri

Comm Prep: Dee Ihlenfeldt

Comm Server: Jeff & Kristi Fortune, Dee Ihlenfeldt

PowerPoint: Conor Fortune

Video: Linda Kenny

Sunday, March 1st 10:30 a.m.

Ushers: Shaun Lambertsen Family

Reader: Paula Sisler

Comm Prep: Serge & Paula Sisler

Comm Server: Fred Austin, Greta Vaughn, Paula Sisler

PowerPoint: Dean Lambertsen

Video: Eli Lambertsen

Wednesday, March 4th 5:00 p.m.

Ushers: Summer Parks

Comm Prep: Dorothy Wood

Comm Server: Dorothy Wood, Laura or Marcy

PowerPoint: Lois Ocenosak

Wednesday, March 4th 6:45 p.m.

All Helpers: WD4 Students

Sunday, March 8th 8:30 a.m.

Ushers: Merlyn & Marlaine Wilken

Reader: Virginia Danielson

Comm Prep: Wilma Anderson, Verna Lewison

Comm Server: Wilma Anderson, Mike & Nancy Bickford

PowerPoint: Lois Ocenosak

Video: Linda Kenny

Sunday, March 8th 8:30 a.m.

Ushers: Ben & Angie Coyle

Reader: Ben Coyle

Comm Prep: Amy Christianson, Dave & Alex Oldham

Comm Server: Amy Christianson, Dave & Alex Oldham

PowerPoint: Ruby Robertson

Video: Sebastian Goldsmith

Wednesday, February 26



Ash Wednesday

Liturgy setting one can be found on pages 57-74 in the green Lutheran Book of Worship

All Are Welcome to commune with Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We serve the fruit of the vine under two forms: wine

and grape juice. The inner ring of the tray is grape juice. If in doubt, please ask the distributor. Gluten free hosts are available; please notify an usher before service begins.

On Ash Wednesday we begin our forty-day journey toward Easter with a day of fasting and repentance. Marking our foreheads with dust, we acknowledge that we die and return to the earth. At the same time, the dust traces the life-giving cross indelibly marked on our foreheads at baptism. While we journey through Lent to return to God, we have already been reconciled to God through Christ. We humbly pray for God to make our hearts clean while we rejoice that "now is the day of salvation." Returning to our baptismal call, we more intentionally bear the fruits of mercy and justice in the world.

Prayer Concerns: Sharm Sisler, Betty Lubben, Bob Hefflefinger, Leslie Swartz, and Bobbie Gersdorf. (Names will be removed from the prayer list after four weeks unless there is a change in the person's condition. Requests need to be made by an immediate family member.)

Blessings to Ben Coyle and Angie Thomas

Who were united in marriage on February 20, 2020.

Lenten meals are starting again March 4, 2020.

Please use the sign up sheet on the bulletin board in church entryway to help in the kitchen or to bring bars or cookies. High school students who need silver cord hours just bring your sheet with you. Thank you so much to all of you who step up every time I call. Lori R

Next Dinner with Friends Fri., Feb. 28 at 5 pm:

Please join us in the old Subway area, party room at Tapken's. A variety of pizzas will be ready to share. \$5 per person to share the pizza cost. Grab your favorite non-alcoholic beverage and delicious Ashby's ice cream on your own. Soups and other foods are available for purchase.

Seeking Congregational Leaders:

If you would like to raise up the name of a person from our faith community you believe could be a leader, please share her/his name with me so I can invite him/her into a time of discernment. Thank you, Pastor Rodney

St. Paul Lutheran World Relief quilt work

begins on Monday, March 2 at 1:00 pm. We will continue to tie quilts each Monday through April 6. As our mothers would say, "many hands make light work." If your hands are free, come work with the quilters.

March is ALY month for St. Paul. See sign-up sheet on the bulletin board.

Ash Wednesday

The first reading today calls us together and directs us to examine our lives as individuals within a community. The second reading turns us outward as a community, reminding us of our identity as the Body of Christ in the world, and that we, like Paul, are ambassadors of love. The season of Lent also invites us to assess ourselves as a church. One of the historical images of the church was that of the "Church Triumphant." Frequently, this was defined as a church without fault and perfect as the Lord is perfect. However, since 1965, leaders have invited us to expand that image to see ourselves as a **Pilgrim Church** always being transformed by Christ the Living Word, on the road of conversion, seeking wholeness in God's grace, aware of our failings and dependent on God. In this sense, the Church is very much like each believer. Despite being prone to sin because of human weakness, God's grace and love triumph over sin when we are faithful. This Lent, find time to "go to your inner room" and encounter the true you. Meet God there and honestly examine how you can become a more faithful and loving person.

Reading I: Book of the Prophet Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 NIV

Like Isaiah and Ezekiel, Joel appears to have been a prophet for the people of the exile (608 – 539 BCE) who served the Temple in Jerusalem as a cultic priest. This reading is appropriate for us who see Ash Wednesday as a Day of the Lord, traditionally understood as a time of judgment. We admit our weaknesses before the Lord and implore his mercy. Like the Israelites who expressed their desire to repent through fasting, crying out, and rending/tearing of garments, we mark our exteriors with ashes so God will know our interior desire to repent and grow in love.

The trumpet referred to in this passage was the *shofar*, a ram's horn blown by the priest from the parapet of the Temple (or highest building) so that all who were working in the fields or shepherding their flocks outside Jerusalem's walls could come together for a pronouncement. In this case, the return to the Lord was so immediate that all natural activities of joy and life, including nursing babies and celebrating honeymoons (making babies), had to make way for signs of repentance so that the Lord would know the peoples' unity in humility.

This reading reminds us that like the Israelites, God has already acted on our behalf to bring about joy and freedom for His own sake. As the noted Jewish scholar Abraham Joshua Heschel reflects: The Hebrew Scriptures are the story of our loving God who reaches out to humanity's longing for acceptance and love despite constant rejection. Having the people acknowledge God's love brings God great joy.

Reading II St. Paul's Second Letter to the Christians in Corinth, Greece 5:20b-6:2 NIV

St. Paul reminds us that we are loved by God, and because of that love we are called daily to live in the image of Christ. Paul communicates a sense of urgency, demanding that we not wait until tomorrow to make a difference in the world, but instead do it today, the day of salvation. If we believe that God truly loves us, then we cannot continue in our sinful ways. Like ambassadors, we must not allow ourselves to participate in sinful division or diminishment of others but bring offers of unity and healing. Today is the day to be reconciled!

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

Don't act like the hypocrites (Greek for "actors")! Perhaps it is obvious, but Jesus is going after the Pharisees and Sadducees again. Much in the same vein as Martin Luther in the early 16th century, Jesus did not intend to begin a new religion; rather, he wanted genuine reform from within, and wanted it to begin with the religious leaders. Both Jesus and Luther had witnessed corruption, greed, and indifference among their leaders, and each called for repentance. However, in Jesus' day, the Sadducees kept on protecting their elite status in the society by staying friendly with the oppressive Roman regime while lining their own pockets with profits from the over-priced sacrificial animals the people were forced to buy in the Temple region (this could be likened to a Jewish form of selling indulgences,

understood as relief from the punishment resulting from rejecting God the source of good. The exploitation of people through this practice was one of Martin Luther's great concerns in the Reformation). Jesus' response was to upset the marketplace owned and managed by the chief priest's families.

Many notable Pharisees paraded around in their ceremonial garb while engaging in pietistic practices so all could see their superior holiness. They were known to even apply makeup to their cheek bones so as to look gaunt and deprived. One has to wonder, "Why did they need to convince people of their holiness?" Did people have good reason to be suspicious of their motives? Perhaps it had to do with their conspicuous wealth which the majority of the people did not enjoy. Whatever the case may be, Jesus was quick to point out that genuine acts of public service or prayer must flow out of and be supported by a heart-felt personal relationship with God. They are not to be done to gain the approval of others.

Don't be actors! Take off your masks! Remove the false self and put forth your true self! This is the challenge given to us by Jesus, but how can we be sure that our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (charity) are not acts done with the wrong perspective? Perhaps the spirit of this season has to do with stewardship: the good works we do, the sacrifices we make, the alms we give are better understood as matters of justice. For example, if I attend services more frequently than usual, I do it realizing that it expresses the kind of praise I owe God every day of the year. If I write a special donation check to a local outreach organization, I might feel good because I've recognized and responded to a need, but more fundamentally, I have given back what has always belonged to the needy children of God who received it. If I fast from food or drink, I do so hoping that it will lead to a more equitable distribution of goods or that those who need it more than I will receive it. Fasting is done to intentionally recognize our dependence on God. We give things up as a reminder that our happiness truly resides in the bounty of God, not from our own efforts and not from those around us who admire our acts. Without a humble heart, the actions of Lent can seem hollow or even breed resentment. And a humble heart is difficult to maintain without openness to the voice of the Lord.

Taking it home:

Make a commitment to spend seven minutes a day during Lent in silence (no radio, TV, phone, etc.) Hold a cross or crucifix in your hand. After seven minutes, record your thoughts, experience, questions....

Is your faith community more attractive to outsiders this year than it was last year? Have you personally helped someone change her or his perspective of faith?

When making a decision, which of these voices most strongly influences you: coach/instructor, friends, parents, Jesus, police, television personalities, music, teacher, minister/priest, celebrities, chat room members...? Is there room for more positive voices?

Cut out a picture of a child from another culture or religion (Iraqi, Afghani, Guatemalan, Islamic, Congan, Native American, Chinese, etc.) and post it somewhere you'll frequently see it. If you were asked to raise this child as your own, could you do it? If you knew you stood between life and death for this child, would you choose life? If yes, what steps can you take now to ensure life for such a child?

When and where have you rejected God's efforts to reach out in love?

A Social Statement on: ABORTION [This social teaching statement was adopted by a more than two-thirds majority vote at the second biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, meeting in Orlando, Florida, August 28-September 4, 1991.]

Support for Life after Birth: Many women choose abortion in a desperate attempt to survive in a hostile social environment. In order to affirm the value of life and reduce the number of abortions, it is essential for us as a church to work to improve support for life in society. Greater social responsibility for the care, welfare, and education of children and families is needed through such measures as access to quality, affordable health care, child care, and housing. Sufficient income support for families needs to be provided by employers, or, in the case of the unemployed, through government assistance. As a society we need to provide increased support for education, nutrition, and services that protect children from abuse and neglect. Because parenthood is a vocation that women and men share, this church supports public and private initiatives to provide adequate maternity and paternity leaves, greater flexibility in the work place, and efforts to correct the disparity between the incomes of men and women. The law must hold both parents responsible for the financial support of their children.

What is the status of this conversation in our local faith community? What words or phrases seem important to you today? What words challenge you?

Mindfulness (set aside five minutes. breathe and read through three times. Which words or ideas hold energy for you? What images emerge in your imagination?)

The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world As it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right If I surrender to His Will;
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life
And supremely happy with Him
Forever and ever in the next. Amen

Lent and Baptism:

Lent is closely associated with the transition from winter to spring. The word "lent," for example, comes from the Anglo-Saxon word for springtime, lencten. It describes the gradual lengthening of daylight after the winter solstice. Lent evolved around the theme of baptism which, from at least the 3rd century, had been associated with the vigil of the anniversary of the Lord's resurrection: the Easter Vigil. During the first centuries, adults seeking church membership could not just sign up; they were "tested" for up to three years. During this time, they were instructed, supported in their withdrawal from pagan practices and loyalties, and taught to live the ways of Christianity. Only when trust had been developed were they admitted to candidacy for baptism. Finally, during what would become Lent, they received intense instruction, submitted to exorcisms, participated in special rituals, fasted on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, and were baptized during the Easter Vigil.

This ritual preparation for Easter was a special time at first only for catechumens. Gradually, it became popular for those already baptized to participate in this tradition of fasting. When the catechumenate was discontinued in the Middle Ages due to the widespread custom of infant baptism, Christians continued the tradition of fasting for forty days in preparation for Easter. (Taken from *Catholic Customs and Traditions*, Greg Dues, Twenty-third Pub. 1995, pg. 74.)