



# **First Presbyterian Church**

**February 17, 2021**

**7 PM**

*Ash Wednesday Service of Prayer and Reflection*

## Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent with a public act of confession. Acknowledging that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory, we repent and return to our loving creator. Acutely aware of our failure and frailty, we express our utter reliance on God's saving grace.

Ash Wednesday developed in the medieval period as a time when penitent sinners were presented for church discipline during the season of Lent, to be reconciled with the community of faith on Maundy Thursday. Ash Wednesday also came to be the occasion for new believers to enroll in the catechumenate, a period of preparation for baptism at Easter. For those who undertake spiritual disciplines, Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten fast.

Ashes are an ancient symbol of repentance, sorrow, and sacrifice. Traditionally, the ashes for this service are made from the palm branches of the previous year; thus the ashes and palms together frame the season of Lent.

*(source: Book of Common Worship)*

### A Prayer for Ash Wednesday

*Holy One, as we come before you on this day with our traditional repentance, we remember those sacred words, ash to ash and dust to dust.*

*Yet, this year is different. We have lived in the wilderness-like atmosphere of Lent for nearly a year. Our world is broken, our hearts are hurting and we need healing and hope. In those broken places, Oh God, let your healing love seep in. In places where we hurt, even amid this pandemic wilderness, allow healing grace to slowly enter our hearts and our lives.*

*In this morose season, may we live into the healing that is so desperately needed. We trust in your holy hope as we remember our mortality. As we venture deeper into the wilderness, help us know that your transforming presence will guide us through to the joy of the resurrection with new found wholeness. Amen.*

*Written by Rebecca Gresham-Kesner*

**Prelude**

**Ah, Holy Jesus**

Martha Kaulbach

### **Centering Prayer**

*O God, my heart has been stained with the sin of this world; my spirit is weary and my joy has grown dim. With the psalmist I pray: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Amen.*

### **Opening Sentences**

God sent Christ into the world not to condemn the world,  
but that the world might be saved through him.

**God's love endures forever.**

God is our refuge and strength, a present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear  
though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;  
though the waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

**God's love endures forever.**

### **Prayer of the Day**

### **Musical Meditation**

Donna James

### **Prayer of Illumination**

### **Scripture**

**Joel 2: 1-2, 12-17**

### **Reflection**

### **Invitation to Observe a Holy Lent**

Beloved people of God: every year at the time of the Christian Passover we celebrate our redemption through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lent is a time to prepare for this celebration and to renew our life in the paschal mystery. We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance, and for the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We begin our journey to Easter with the sign of ashes. This ancient sign speaks of the frailty and uncertainty of human life, and marks the penitence of this community.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of Christ, to observe a holy Lent by self-examination and penitence, by prayer and fasting, by works of love, and by meditating on God's word. Now let us bow before God, our creator and redeemer, and confess our sin.

**Psalm 51**

***Psalm 51:1-17***

**Silence**

**Musical Meditation**

***Were You There***

Martha Kaulbach

**Litany of Penitence**

Holy and merciful God,  
we confess to you and to one another,  
and to the whole communion of saints  
in heaven and on earth,  
that we have sinned by our own fault  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done,  
and by what we have left undone.  
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.

**Have mercy on us, O God.**

We have not listened 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.

**Have mercy on us, O God.**

We confess to you, O God, all our past unfaithfulness.  
For the pride, hypocrisy, and impatience in our lives,

**have mercy on us, O God.**

For our self-indulgent appetites and ways  
and our exploitation of other people,

**have mercy on us, O God.**

For our anger at our own frustration  
and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,

**have mercy on us, O God.**

For our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts,  
and our dishonesty in daily life and work,

**have mercy on us, O God.**

For our negligence in prayer and worship,  
and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,

**have mercy on us, O God.**

Accept our repentance, O God,  
for the wrongs we have done.

For our neglect of human need and suffering  
and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,

**have mercy on us, O God.**

For all false judgments,  
for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors,  
and for our prejudice and contempt  
toward those who differ from us,

**have mercy on us, O God.**

For our waste and pollution of your creation  
and our lack of concern for those who come after us,

**have mercy on us, O God.**

Restore us, O God of our salvation,  
and show us your steadfast love.

**Turn to us in your mercy and redeem us.**

**Hymn**

***My Song is Love Unknown***

PH 76

**Blessing and Charge**

## A Pastoral Prayer for Lent

*God of mercy and of grace,  
you have spoken in a loud voice and in a voice still and small.  
Listen now in these days of reflection, not to the deserving of our voices shouted,  
but to the yearning of our hearts as they whisper.*

*God of wisdom and of grace,  
by the Spirit of Christ your Word echoes in the unity of this scattered people.  
As we examine our place in the order of being, listen not to the logic of our cases argued  
but to the hope of our belief that you are listening.*

*Bathed in that hope we pray for the church, O God:  
In our prayers for the church we long for the days,  
more now than a year gone by,  
when we could be together,  
laugh, pray, and sing together,  
smile, hug, and weep together,  
as well as butt our heads together.  
Give us grace to reclaim the good of that memory  
and wisdom to meet the challenges of this day.  
The world is more complex now as is the act of living in and as the church.  
As a congregation of your scattered people keep us dreaming.  
We want to be a united voice of truth,  
a beacon of justice,  
a balm of healing,  
a sanctuary of justice,  
a people of nurture  
where children are seen as signs of your kingdom,  
where noble ideas are fostered in the days of youth,  
where faithfulness is encouraged among grownups,  
where the wisdom of long years is cherished, and  
where truth is demanded in high places.*

*Come, Holy Spirit of Christ,  
move among us that in these days when it is so easy not to be the church  
that we might be your brave and faithful people*

*united in love though separate in space.*

*Not for the church alone, O God,  
but in this day of self examination we pray for our nation and world as well:  
We hear on all sides voices filled with anger born of fear  
and voices of fear born of anger as sides are chosen in blind rage.  
We are grateful, then, for leaders who long in quiet strength to do your will.  
Fill them with grace and right conviction to foster patience, understanding, healing,  
and, above all, truth.*

*We recognize around the world in pictures we see nightly  
people whose lives are shattered by war, famine, and disease,  
by natural disaster, corruption, and shameless greed.  
Show us ways in which we, every one of us,  
can be signs and means of your healing even as we speak with the voice of prophets  
demanding that our leaders see and do the healing thing.*

*And now hear again the prayers we so often speak  
for those who grieve  
and those who comfort them;  
for those who are anxious  
and those who steady them;  
for those who are lonely  
and those who befriend them;  
for those who are tired  
and those who share their load;  
for those who are confused  
and those who point the way;  
for those who are addicted  
and those who love them;  
for those who are guilty  
and those who forgive them;  
and, yes, oh yes a thousand times yes,  
in these days of unspeakable disease, we pray  
for those who are desperately ill*

*and those who attend them;*

*for those who are dying alone  
and the nurses who hold their hands;  
for those who are quarantined  
and those who phone them;  
for those who are out of work  
and those who feed them;  
for those who are not in school  
and those who teach them;  
for those who tirelessly seek prevention and cure  
and for all of us who are grateful to them.  
As always we close our prayer humbly asking  
that you give us grace as those who are called  
to be answers to these our earnest prayers.  
We pray in the name of the one who,  
without ceasing,  
prays for us...  
especially for us...  
especially for everyone. Amen.*

[1]. Adapted from *Prayers for the Lord's Day: Hope for the Exiles*, James S. Lowry, Geneva Press, Louisville, Kentucky, p. 34f

## **Holy Week Happenings, March 29—April 2**

### **Stations of the Cross**

Throughout the week, you are invited to walk through the prayer stations set up in Scoggins Hall and accompany Jesus to the cross. Please come as you are available, 8 am - 1 pm.

### **Maundy Thursday, 7 PM**

We gather with Jesus around the Table to consider his command to “love one another”. Communion will be served.

### **Good Friday Tenebrae Service, 7 PM**

A service of darkness as we ponder together the Passion of Jesus.

