

ASH WEDNESDAY

Welcome to our Ash Wednesday service. We invite you to find a seat where you can comfortably and quietly engage in this time of prayer and reflection. A main goal for the coming moments would be that this sacred time would help you abide with Christ as Lent begins.

What is Ash Wednesday?

For those that are not familiar with this day and this type of service, Ash Wednesday is recognized by the Church as the first day of Lent and marks the beginning of the forty-day season leading into Easter (forty days not counting Sundays, which are observed as days of celebration and renewal). Services of worship on this day focus on repentance and also symbolize the start of a forty-day wilderness period, such as Jesus' rhythm of fasting and prayer in the wilderness (*Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; and Luke 4:1-13*).

Ash Wednesday gets its name from the practice of a fellow believer marking the forehead of each participant with ashes in the shape of a cross, which the worshipper traditionally retains until it wears off. Ashes were used in the ancient times to express mourning and repentance (*Job 42:3-6; Numbers 9:17, 19:10; Jonah 3:6; Matthew 11:21; and Hebrews 9:13*).

As you follow this guide, we remind you that the goal for this service is threefold: to meditate on our mortality, sinfulness, and need of a Savior; to renew our commitment to the daily rhythm of repentance in the Lenten Season and in all of life; and to remember with confidence and gratitude Christ's victory over death and sin—creating life from the nothingness, from the ashes and brokenness of our lives.

Prepare & Reflect

As you begin, take a few minutes to breathe deeply and prepare your heart to hear from the Lord.

You have come into this service as a broken and incomplete person:

Lest they tear me like a lion, rending me in pieces, while there is none to deliver. - Psalm 7:2

I said, "Lord, be merciful to me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You." - Psalm 41:4

However, find assurance in this:

He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. - Psalm 23:3

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! - Galatians 1:20-21

We are all broken people, with broken and incomplete souls. Lent is a time to dwell on that brokenness. It is a time to put sin to death and to be crucified with Christ. It is a time to remember that it is only through the death and resurrection of Jesus that we can be restored to an abiding relationship with God. The divide is simply too great for us because of our own sinfulness.

Read this prayer, asking God to restore your soul:

God, my heart chases after all of the wrong things. I'm so easily entangled by the patterns of the world, and by the desires of my flesh. I have run from you, and yet it is Your kindness that leads me to repentance. It is Your mercy that I seek, because I am a sinner in need of forgiveness and grace. Please forgive my lack of faith, my disobedience, and my propensity to sin. I want to be near Your heart, and I want to follow Your ways all the days of my life. Amen..

It is not enough for us as people of God to say that we have sinned generically, but we must specifically name our sins before our Father. We are accountable for specific sin that separates us from God—remember the “wages of sin is death.” Please take a few moments to examine specific ways in which you have sinned against God. Name those things to Him and ask God for an understanding of the brokenness your sin has caused and ask Him to put to death that sin within you. If it is helpful to you, write those things down.

Communion

A large part of abiding with Christ is communing with Him. Through communion, we are reminded of our ability to be near our Father only because of the grace and wholeness He has extended to us, even though we come to the table as broken people.

All believers in Jesus are invited to come to the front of the room to take communion—tear a piece of bread from the loaf and dip it in the juice. You will hear the phrases “the body of Christ, broken for you” and “the blood of Christ, poured out for you” as you receive the elements. Please return to your seat after you have taken communion and reflect on Christ’s extravagant grace.

“...We implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God.” – 2 Corinthians 5:20b-21

Communion is a beautiful mystery. It was us that put Jesus on the cross. We are the reason He died. We betrayed Him. And yet, we are invited to His table of forgiveness. We dine with Him as welcomed guests. This table is all at once full of despair, and yet also full of life. We put to death our old selves, and we receive reconciliation through the body and blood of Jesus, to find new life. It is only then that we find restoration, wholeness, and right standing with God—imputed righteousness, which is God’s gift to us through His son, Jesus.

Take 5 minutes or so to remember the gift of salvation in your own life. Remind yourself of your need for a Savior. List the ways you are grateful to God for His kindness towards you.

Ashes

After a time of reflection, we invite you to go to the front of the room and receive ashes on your forehead as a reminder of this reality. We speak this verse over you: “For dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19). We ask you to also remember that these ashes remain on your forehead to symbolize sin in your life and the repentance that is needed. As you go throughout the rest of your day, the ashes can even be a catalyst for conversation with others about the extravagant love of Christ poured out for you despite your sin. After receiving ashes, please return to your seat.

Dwell on the words of Psalm 51 (read it several times, slowly and methodically):

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to

sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. May it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous, in burnt offerings offered whole; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” - Matthew 11:28

Please take a moment to rest in the knowledge that though you have run from God and though you may feel separation from Him because of your sin, your sure hope is that you will eternally rest with Jesus someday—complete and whole, and certainly not forsaken, and you will ABIDE in His presence forever.

Stations of the Cross

Please spend the last moments of your time reflecting over the Stations of the Cross in The Commons (the lobby area outside of the auditorium). These stations will walk you through Christ’s journey on earth—a journey that eventually led to the most important events in the history of the world. Once you have gone through these stations, you are free to go.

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” - Numbers 6:24-26

Stations of the Cross

1. JESUS IS TEMPTED

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

- Matthew 26:38

- Jesus is compelled to desperate prayer.
- Think of Jesus' complete honesty as He prays.
- Jesus gathers His community in his most desperate time of prayer.
- What drives you to such a desperate time of prayer?

2. JESUS IS BETRAYED

"Friend, do what you came here to do." - Matthew 26:50

"The son of man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him and after three days he will rise." - Mark 9:31

- The son of God was betrayed by a friend.
- The son of God was betrayed by His creation.
- Have you ever been betrayed? What did that feel like? Imagine how Jesus felt.

3. JESUS IS CONDEMNED

"Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked.

"We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. - John 19:15

"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." - John 19:11

"But this is your hour - when darkness reigns." - Luke 22:53 and Luke 22:66-71

- Jesus submits quietly and peacefully.
- Jesus is condemned by religious leaders.
- Why did they fear Him?

4. JESUS IS MOCKED

"But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" - John 18:23

- These soldiers brutalize Jesus. This was common to do to Jewish prisoners.
- Imagine the Son of God being brutalized by men.

5. JESUS IS GIVEN HIS CROSS

"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." - John 3:14-15

- The cross was a public murder device for criminals. A billboard of sorts to say "don't mess with the Roman government." This is why Jesus was killed.
- Imagine carrying the wood of the cross up the hill to your eventual slow and public death.

6. JESUS FALLS

"Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." - John 12:24

- This station, although not found in scripture, is traditionally in three stations. It symbolizes Christ's humanity and His ever-decreasing strength as He moves towards his public death.
- Imagine Jesus experiencing weakness and distress in a public setting with nowhere to hide.
- Imagine the exhaustion of the last 24 hours.

Stations of the Cross (continued)

7. SIMON CARRIES JESUS' CROSS

Simon the Cyrene carries His cross. - Luke 23:26

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." - Matthew 16:24

- Imagine being pulled from the crowd and carrying the cross of the Son of God.
- What is it like to walk alongside Jesus in this?

8. JESUS IS STRIPPED

"For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" - Luke 23:31

"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. - Luke 23:34

- Romans crucified criminals stripped of their clothing
- Reflect on the shame of nakedness in the Garden of Eden and the attempt to also shame Christ in this moment.

9. JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

"When you have lifted up the Son of Man then you will know that I am the one i claim to be...." - John 8:28

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all mankind to myself." - John 12:32

"My God My God, why have you forsaken me?" - Matthew 27:46

- The long physical pain of crucifixion was excruciating. In fact, the word excruciating is derived from the word crucifixion.
- Empathize with Christ and try to comprehend the pain that He felt in those moments.

10. JESUS DIES

"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." - Isaiah 53:7

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." - John 15:13

"It is finished." - John 19:30

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." - Luke 23:46

- Jesus died. His earthly lungs breathed their last breath.
- His friends watched Him die.
- Imagine being there to see him in His last moments.

11. JESUS IS BURIED

"When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial." - Matthew 26:12

- His friends buried Him. Have you ever buried a loved one?
- Imagine burying the One you believed was going to change the world and bring ultimate justice and healing.
- Imagine the finality they felt when they buried His body.

12. JESUS RISES

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays his life down for his sheep." - John 10:11

"Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the son of man has been raised from the dead." - Matthew 17:9

"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." - Revelation 1:17-18

- Jesus shows us that there is something beyond death.
- Think about the emotions his friends would have felt when they realized He had conquered death.
- Imagine what it would be like to bury a friend, and then three days later realize they were alive again.
- Imagine the hope that sprang up from the ground in those moments and days after His resurrection.