

Spirit of Grace

ELCA UMC



March 2nd, 2022

Ash Wednesday

Prelude

Welcome

Contemplative Music

Confession & Forgiveness

In the name of God,
who makes a way in the wilderness,
walks with us,
and guides us in our pilgrimage
Amen.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Holy One,
**we confess that we have wandered far from you:
we have not trusted your promises,
we have ignored your prophets in our own day,
we have squandered our inheritance of grace,
we have failed to recognize you in our midst.**

**Have mercy on us!
Forgive us and turn us again to you.
Teach us to follow in your ways,
assure us again of your love,
and help us to love our neighbor.
Amen.**

Beloved in Christ,
the Word draws near to you,
and all who call out to God shall be saved.
In Jesus, † God comes to you again and again
and gathers you under wings of love.
In Jesus' name, your sins are forgiven.
God journeys with you and teaches you how to live in love.
Amen.

Greeting & Prayer of the Day

The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the
Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

...

Amen.

First Reading: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Blow the shofar in Zion!
Sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the people of the land tremble!
For the Day of YHWH is coming – it is near –
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of fog and dense clouds.
A vast and countless horde appears
like soot spread over the hills;
it is like something never known before,
nor will be seen in ages to come.

“But know this,” says YHWH:
“Return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, weeping, and mourning.
Tear open your heart,
not your clothes!”
Return to YHWH your God,
who is gracious and deeply loving as a mother,
quick to forgive, abundantly tender-hearted –
and relents from inflicting disaster.
Who knows? God may come back, relent,
and leave a blessing behind –
grain and drink offerings
for YHWH your God.
Sound the shofar in Zion!
Order a fast!
Proclaim a solemn assembly!
Gather the people!
Purify the community!
Assemble the elders!
Gather the children –
even infants at the breast!
Let the bridegroom leave his bedroom
and the bride her canopied bed!
Let the priests, the ministers of YHWH,
stand weeping between the portico and the altar
and say, “Spare your people, YHWH!
Don’t let your heritage become an object of ridicule,
a byword for the Nations!
Don’t let the peoples say, ‘Where is their God?’”

Word of God, Word of Life

Thanks be to God.

Psalm 51:1-9

translation by Nan C. Merrill, from "Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness"

Have mercy on me, O Gracious One,
according to your steadfast love;
According to your abundant kindness
forgive me where my thoughts and
deeds have hurt others.

**Lead me in the paths of justice,
guide my steps on paths of peace!**

Teach me, that I may know my weaknesses,
the shortcomings that bind me,
The unloving ways that separate me,
that keep me from recognizing
your Life in me;

**For, I keep company with fear, and
dwell in the house of ignorance.**

**Yet, I was brought forth in love,
and love is my birthright.**

You have placed your truth in the
inner being;
therefore, teach me the wisdom
of the heart.

**Forgive all that binds me in fear,
that I might radiate love;
cleanse me that your light might
shine in me.**

Fill me with gladness; help me to
transform weakness into strength.

**Look not on my past mistakes
but on the aspirations
of my heart.**

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-8, 14-21

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew the 6th chapter.

“Beware of practicing your piety before others to attract their attention; if you do this, you will have no reward from your Abba God in heaven.

“When you do acts of charity, for example, don’t have it trumpeted before you; that is what hypocrites do in the synagogues and streets, that they may be praised by others. The truth is, they’ve already received their reward in full. But when you do acts of charity, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; your good deeds must be done in secret, and your Abba God - who sees all that is done in secret - will repay you.

“And when you pray, don’t behave like the hypocrites; they love to pray standing up in the synagogues and on street corners for people to see them. The truth is, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to God who is in that secret place, and your Abba God - who sees all that is done in secret - will reward you.

“And when you pray, don’t babble like the Gentiles. They think God will hear them if they use a lot of words. Don’t imitate them. Your God knows what you need before you ask it.

“If you forgive the faults of others, Abba God will forgive you yours. If you don’t forgive others, neither will Abba God forgive you.

“And when you fast, don’t look depressed like the hypocrites. They deliberately neglect their appearance to let everyone know they are fasting. The truth is, they have already received their reward. But when you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. Don’t let anyone know you’re fasting except your Abba God, who sees all that is done in secret. And Abba God - who sees everything that is done in secret - will reward you.

“Don’t store up earthly treasures for yourselves, which moths and rust destroy and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can destroy them and thieves cannot break in and steal them. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be as well.”

Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Rev. Miranda Bermes-Goller

Hymn of the Day: Sundays Palms are Wednesday’s Ashes – TFWS 2138, v. 1 & 3

- The Imposition of Ashes -

Remembering our Roots

When the garden was lush,
still brimming with life and beauty,
rich in nutrients and possibility,
God gathered the soil of the earth,
and breathed us into life.

**From dust we were created,
and to dust we will return.**

Not a man – an Adamah.
Earth creature.
A being of the soil.
First a lonely one.
Then love called for two,
differentiated and distinct,
but also flesh of my flesh,
bone of my bone.
Both, soil of the earth,
Kin to all that lives.
Created very good, indeed.

**From dust we were created,
and to dust we will return.**

This refrain calls us back to our gritty and humble beginnings.
It jolts us awake by reminding us of death.
The inevitable returning home.

When the time comes,
the garden, the body of the earth that birthed us,
will welcome us back like the forgiveness of God,
embracing us in ways that will transform even the most cruel among us
into sources of nourishment for lives to come.

**From dust we were created,
and to dust we will return.**

It doesn't make sense, this grace.
For generations, some have worked feverishly to sever us from our family tree,
hacking over and over at the roots of finitude and flesh,
destroying everything and everyone who tells the story
of who we really are –
vulnerable and precarious creatures,
hungry for relationship,
starved in isolation,
not set above our earthly kin,
but set within a delicate web of interconnection.
So much had been destroyed, betraying this origin story.

**From dust we were created,
and to dust we will return.**

But we don't have to wait.

We cannot evade death,
but we can choose life
in these fleeting precious days.
We can mend,
we can protect,
we can repent,
we can return.

If we just pay attention,
to our bodies,
each other,
the birds and the air,
we can recognize the holy groans
of the earth, calling us home.

**From dust we were created,
and to dust we will return.
Amen.**

Imposition of Ashes

A New Creed - Statement of Faith of the United Church of Canada

Please stand as you are able as we confess our faith in God together:

**We are not alone
we live in God's world.
We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.
We trust in God.
We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our redeemer and our hope.
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Prayers of the People

The Spirit of the Lord is poured out upon us in abundance; so we are bold to pray for the church, the world, and all that God has made.

A brief silence.

Renew your church, O God. When we have drifted from our call to proclaim repentance and to guide your people toward justice, lead us back to you. Encourage believers who hold the church's doors open to those who have felt excluded.
Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Renew your creation, O God. Transform parched places into watered gardens and preserve every creature that awaits the arrival of spring. Turn each of us from practices of environmental exploitation to become responsible stewards of all you have made.

Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Renew this congregation, O God. During these forty days of Lent, confirm our sense of mission and expand our imagination for ministry. Deepen our faith, increase our love, and draw us into your unfolding work of healing and restoration.

Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

As we mark ashes on our foreheads, we give you praise, O God, for all the saints who died and yet are alive with you, especially John Wesley and Charles Wesley, whom we commemorate today. Receive us with them into your eternal embrace.

Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Knowing that you hear every thought in our heart before the words leave our lips, we lift these prayers to you, loving God. And as we are gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Blessing the Dust

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.

Dismissal

Claimed by God
Marked for Christ,
Sent with the Spirit,
Go in peace. Bear witness to the wonders of our God.
Thanks be to God.

Spirit of Grace
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Church Office Hours

Closed on Fridays

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Attributions

Confession and Forgiveness - Augsburg Fortress, 2022

Psalm Translation - from *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness* by Nan C. Merrill

Ash Wednesday Litany - Rev. M Barclay, enfleshed, adapted by Rev. Miranda Bermes-Goller

Prayers of the People - Augsburg Fortress, 2022

Blessing the Dust - from *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons* by Jan Richardson