



## Ash Wednesday Worship Service

### Helpful Elements:

- Purple tablecloth (Lenten color)
- Burlap and/or gray table runner (Ash Wednesday only)
- Ashes mixed with a little olive oil (*not* water)
- Wet, soapy towel and dry towel, for cleaning hands

**Welcome:** Welcome! I want to welcome you to our time of community and fellowship. My name is \_\_\_\_ and I'll be leading our worship time today. It's unusual to meet on a Wednesday, but today is Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent, the 40 days leading up to Easter. It's a time of dependence on God and humility, modeled on Jesus' 40-day fast in the wilderness. For all of Lent, our table color will be purple, the color of repentance.

"Lent, which comes from the Germanic word for springtime, can be viewed as a spiritual spring cleaning: a time for cleaning out those things that hinder our relationship with Jesus Christ and our service to him. That's why Lent begins with a symbol of repentance: placing ashes mixed with oil on one's forehead. Ultimately, our Lenten disciplines are supposed to transform our entire person, body, soul, and spirit, and help us become more like Christ."<sup>1</sup>

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

### Opening Prayer:

Father in Heaven,  
the light of your truth bestows sight  
to the darkness of sinful eyes.  
May this season of repentance  
bring us the blessing of Your forgiveness

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.churchyear.net/lent.html>

and the gift of Your light.  
Grant this through Christ our Lord.<sup>2</sup>

### **Hymn: Doxology**

**Statement of Faith:** Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23 together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup>He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

<sup>3</sup>He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup>Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup>Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

<sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

### **Suggested Hymn: Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us**

**First reading:** Psalm 103: 8-14

The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

<sup>9</sup>He will not always chide,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.

<sup>10</sup>He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

<sup>11</sup>For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

<sup>12</sup>as far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

<sup>13</sup>As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

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<sup>2</sup> International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL)

<sup>14</sup> For he knows how we are formed;  
he remembers that we are dust.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

**Suggested Hymns:**

**Amazing Grace**

**Jesus Loves Me**

**Second reading: Matthew 4:1-11**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> And after fasting forty days and forty nights, Jesus was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." <sup>4</sup> But Jesus answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took Jesus to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple<sup>6</sup> and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to the devil, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup> And the devil said to Jesus, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

<sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil left Jesus, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

**Suggested Hymns:**

**It is Well with My Soul**

**Standing on the Promises**

**Shall We Gather at the River**

## Interactive Homily:

- Lent is a time of humility and dependence on God; as our earlier reading says, “Lent is like a spiritual spring cleaning.”<sup>3</sup> What is it like when you clean something, like your house or laundry?
  - Something dirty or ugly; you notice it, it bothers you; it takes effort; when it’s done, it feels good!
- The sign of Ash Wednesday is, of course, ashes. When you have ashes, what does that mean happened? What did you start with?
  - Could be paper, or wood, or coal; turns into ashes.
  - Something has burned; something is changed.
- I wonder why we place ashes on our forehead? Let’s think about the symbol: What is true about every single human being on this earth?
  - We all die eventually; it’s part of the cycle of life itself.
  - Ashes are, then, tangible sign, a reminder, of our own mortality. Ashes help us remember that:
    - we are human
    - we are not perfect
    - we all make mistakes.
- But we don’t just slap ashes on our foreheads; the ashes are applied in the shape of a cross. What does the cross represent?
  - A reminder of Christ’s death on the cross, paying the penalty for our sin, to reconcile us to God.
  - The ashes and cross *combine* the truth of our mortality with Christ’s work to redeem us and give us everlasting life.
- In celebrating Ash Wednesday, we bring our mortal beings before God; as God told Adam and Eve, “for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” God knows all our weaknesses, and God calls us to be forgiven and cleansed. We celebrate God’s steadfast love for us. You are forgiven!

## Thanksgiving Over the Ashes:<sup>4</sup>

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth.  
Grant that these ashes may be to us a sign of our mortality and repentance,  
so that we may remember that only by your gracious gift  
are we given everlasting life;  
through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.churchyear.net/lent.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-service-of-worship-for-ash-wednesday>

*[Quietly play CD of hymn music. Walk around and ask each person if they'd like to receive ashes on their forehead.]*

**Imposition of the Ashes (say over each person):**

Remember that thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return.

Let us pray together in silence for a moment.

**(Silent Prayer)** ... Lord, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord's prayer together:

**Lord's Prayer:** Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

**Suggested Hymns:**

**I Need Thee Every Hour**

**My Jesus, I Love Thee**

**Third Reading:** "The Peace of Wild Things," by Wendell Barry

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.

And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

**Suggested Hymns:**

**The Old Rugged Cross**

**When I Survey the Wondrous Cross**

**Closing Blessing:<sup>5</sup>**

May God, who has forgiven and fed us,  
now make us strong for these days ahead.  
May Jesus lead us, and may we be faithful to follow.  
May the Spirit drive us into the wilderness,  
burning away the chaff of our lives,  
and purifying our hearts for all to see  
and be blessed.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. Amen.

**Closing Hymn: Doxology, Reprise**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/contemporary-service-for-ash-wednesday>

**Extra Material:**

Almighty God,  
whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit  
to be tempted by Satan;  
Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations;  
and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us,  
let each one find you mighty to save;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. Amen.  
*(1979 Book of Common Prayer)*