

WHAT IS ASH WEDNESDAY?

Our Ash Wednesday service finds some of its religious roots in two ancient Jewish traditions. One tradition, Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement, includes a long confessional statement listing sins that believers have committed both knowingly and unknowingly. The Litany of Penitence parallels this long confessional statement in its attempt to recognize the depth and breadth of our sin. In addition, the practice of putting on "sackcloth and ashes" as a sign of repentance is recalled in the sign of the cross placed in ashes on the forehead (or hand.)

However, at the heart of this service is our Savior Jesus Christ.

Tonight, as we begin our Lenten journey, we recall that Jesus was tempted in the desert for 40 days and nights. And we remember that it was there, in the midst of desolation and dark despair, in the midst of shadows and solitude, that Jesus discovered a bit more about who he was and what he was called to do. It was there that he discovered what was essential and what was unnecessary in his life.

Each Ash Wednesday reminds us that we are to follow in Jesus' footsteps with increased intentionality. Each Lenten season provides us with an opportunity to discover anew what is essential in our lives and what is not. We are challenged to look deeply within that we might recognize afresh who we are. We are called to "repent", to turn in a new direction, and serve our living God with greater courage, insight, and commitment.

Trinity Presbyterian Church

Valdosta, Georgia

1 March 2017



*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.*

~Psalm 51:10

Prelude

GATHERING AROUND GOD'S WORD

Call to Worship

Once again, as the season of Lent begins, we are summoned by a gracious and merciful God.

We respond to God's steadfast love, calling us into solemn assembly.

Let all the people gather for self-examination; let all bow in awe before the One Who Creates.

We approach God in reverence and wonder, rejoicing in the invitation to holy places.

Walk humbly before God in secret disciplines, in prayer and fasting and giving.

We seek the One who grants us life, upholding us with a willing spirit.

Opening Hymn #543

Abide With Me

Eventide

Unison First Reading

Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to Your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified in Your sentence and blameless when You pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that You have crushed rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. 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. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will return to You. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of Your deliverance. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise. For You have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, You would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Silence

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

Silence

Litany of Penitence

Glorious God, Your thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are Your ways our ways. You look at the ugliest soul and see, still unstirred, the wings of an angel.

We scan the finest of our neighbors, anxious to find the flaw.

You view time in the context of eternity, and so find a place for waiting, for yearning, even for suffering, even for dying.

We demand instant results and look for tomorrow before savoring today.

You know that only one who suffers can ultimately save, that is why You walk the way of the cross.

We fear the vulnerability which defies our power and so we cry for crucifixion.

Your thoughts are not our thoughts

Neither are Your ways our ways.

And yet we know that Your way is the ladder to heaven, while, left to our own devices, our ways slope downwards to hell. But we are here, not to have our worst confirmed, but to have our best liberated. So we pray,

Forgive in us what has gone wrong, repair in us what is wasted, reveal in us what is good.

And nourish us with better food than we could ever purchase: Your word, Your love, Your inspiration, Your daily bread for our life's journey, in the company of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Invitation to the Observance of the Lenten Discipline

Imposition of the Ashes

Closing Prayer

Closing Hymn #81

St. Flavian
Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days

Charge and Benediction

Where Christ walks**we will follow.**

Where Christ stumbles....**we will stop.**

Where Christ cries....**we will listen.**

Where Christ suffers....**we will hurt.**

Where Christ dies....**we will bow our heads in sorrow.**

When Christ rises again in glory....**we shall share his endless joy.**

There is no other way....**Christ is the only way.**

Depart in Silence