

**First Presbyterian Church
Carson City**

February 17, 2021



**ASH
WEDNESDAY**

Ash Wednesday Service

February 17, 2021

7:00 p.m.

Welcome and Introduction

Prelude - Come With Us, O Blessed Jesus

Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring / Schop / Arr. Wood

Call To Worship

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

Let us stand and sing to our God.

Hymn - #574 If My People's Hearts Are Humbled

Reading of the Ten Commandments

Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God.

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.

Honor your father and your mother

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Unison Prayer of Confession

Most holy and merciful Father; we acknowledge and confess before you. We have yielded to a sinful nature; we have been prone to evil and slothful in good. You know all our shortcomings and offenses. You alone know how often we have sinned.

For the times we have wandered from your ways;

For the times we have wasted your gifts;

For the times we have forgotten your love;

For the times we have hardened our hearts toward those in need;

For the times we have been indifferent toward justice and mercy;

For the times we have acted with arrogance rather than humility;

We ask for your mercy and forgiveness, O God. According to your steadfast love; according to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out our transgressions. Create in us a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within us. Cast us not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from us. Restore unto us the joy of your salvation and uphold us with your free Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Personal Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Forgiveness

Sung Assurance - #325 Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face To Face

Imposition of Ashes

Worshipers are invited, as a sign of penitence before God, to come forward to receive the imposition of ashes. You may then return to your seat for a time of silent meditation.

Hymn #438

Cleanse Me

Old Testament Lesson:

Joel 2: 1-2; 12 -17

Lenten Meditation:

Even Now

Special Music

Jesus, Draw Me Ever Nearer

Becker / Getty / Arr. Koerts

*John Bullis, Alan Jones, Susie Zallar, Jacque Dyer, Paul Weaver
Ron Cashion, Donald Scherer, Nina Sattely, Sonja Radig*

The Lord's Supper

Closing Hymn - #366

I Surrender All

Blessing and Charge

Postlude -

God of Grace

Getty / Rea / quoting *New Britain* / Arr. Larson

Why Ash Wednesday?

Why Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. The early church determined that the Lenten period of fasting and renewal should correspond to Christ's fasting (Matt. 4:2), and by counting forty days back from Easter (excluding Sundays, which remain "feast" days), arrived at the Wednesday seven weeks before Easter. At one time Lent was primarily viewed as a period during which converts prepared for baptism on Easter Sunday, but later the season became a general time of penitence and renewal for all Christians. And Ash Wednesday became the day that marked the beginning of the Lenten renewal.

Why "Ash"?

Ashes have a long history in biblical and church traditions. In Scripture ashes (dust) symbolize frailty or death (Gen. 18:27), sadness or mourning (Esther 4:3), judgment (Lam. 3:16) and repentance (Jon. 3:6). Some traditions also have considered ash a purifying or cleansing agent.

All these images are caught up in the church's use of ashes as a symbol appropriate for Lent. In Christ's passion we see God's judgment on evil; in our penitence we express sorrow and repentance for our sins; in our rededication we show that we are purified and renewed.

At Calvin, we understand the imposition of ashes as an opportunity to reaffirm our baptism and testify to God's electing love, which claims us and marks us as his own. Paul tells us that we have been "buried" with Christ through baptism, so that we may live with Christ in glory (Romans 6:1-11). The Biblical symbol of ashes of repentance remind us of this burial, the death of the old self, which then makes possible the coming to life of a new person. This does not happen through our good works, but through God's gracious calling.

The ash used in Ash Wednesday worship services is usually the ashes from the palm leaves of the previous year's Palm Sunday celebration. Mixed with water or oil, the ash is carried in a small dish; as worshipers come forward, the leaders dip their thumbs in the ash and make a cross on each forehead ("imposition"). To each person they may say one of the following: "You are not your own; you belong to Jesus Christ" (HC1), "Repent and believe the good news" (Mk 1:15), "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19), "Consider yourself dead to sin and alive in Jesus Christ" (Rom 6:11), or "You are not your own; you have been bought at a price" (I Cor 6:19,20).

The cleansing motif of ashes is reiterated in the psalm reading that follows: "Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps. 51:2). And the ultimate outcome for the penitent child of God is reflected in the closing prayer: "...that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure and holy, so that at the last we may come to his eternal joy..." (Book of Common Prayer).

STILL WONDERING WHETHER YOU OUGHT TO HAVE THE IMPOSITION OF ASH?

Ashes? Yes!

Ashes—Yes, but don't bother coming up if it's only a novelty, only a curious ritual, only a substitute. The prophet Joel says, "It may be O.K. to rend your garments and douse yourself with a bucket of ashes, but if it's only a ritual—don't bother. Rend your hearts, and ask for forgiveness." Kneel down here, but only if your heart and spirit is submissive to the Lord.

Ashes? Yes, but Make Your Heart Right

Why ashes? When I clean out my fireplace, I get streaks of dirt on my hands, and the dead leftovers get put in the trash. Ashes are inert, dead, dirty. And maybe that's why God's people of old put ashes on their heads—to show that they were mortal and spiritually empty. Ashes became a symbol for the barrenness of their lives, of their need for forgiveness, and of their desire for renewal.

Yes, you may wish to come to have ashes imposed on your head, but remember, probably nothing mysterious or magical or mystical will happen. Rather we do this to show that with God's ancient people, we know in our bones and skin that we, in ourselves, are dead, and we say, "Lord, we repent in dust and ashes. Forgive us. Revive us again."

Ashes? Yes, but Do Justice

Ashes—Yes, it's the right kind of ritual. But again, don't bother if this is a substitute for living right. The Lord thunders through the prophet Isaiah: I'm tired of your church services, your sermons, your Praise & Worship, your seeker services, your Ash Wednesday rituals. These things mean nothing if you're not obedient to me, and if you don't undo the violence in your society, the injustice that cries to heaven. The ashes on your forehead should make you work for justice for the poor and homeless, for peace in South Africa and Afghanistan, and against racism on your campus.

Ashes? Yes, but Seek New Life in Christ

Finally—ashes only because they will be applied in the form of a cross. Ashes of deadness only because the cross has given us new life. In celebrating the church year, always remember that even during Easter we still see the outline of the cross; and during Lent we already see the promise of the open tomb.

We leave the service quietly, meditatively, but also joyfully. We are sinners, but forgiven sinners. We lift high the cross. We go through Lent with renewed gratitude to Christ, with new discipline and dedication. You may keep the ashes on your forehead for the day (if you don't feel too self-conscious about it), but we know that Christ has already turned our ashes into the garland of victory.

~ Written by Harry Boonstra, for Reformed Worship, Issues 6 & 30, ©1993, CRC Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan. www.reformedworship.org. Used with permission.

Adapted by Laura Smit, Dean of the Chapel at Calvin College, 2006.

DEVOTIONAL READINGS FOR MEDITATION

We Must Walk Before God in Humility and Truth (from *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a' Kempis, Book 3, Chapter 4)

The Voice of Christ

MY CHILD, walk before Me in truth, and seek Me always in the simplicity of your heart. He who walks before Me in truth shall be defended from the attacks of evil, and the truth shall free him from seducers and from the slanders of wicked men. For if the truth has made you free, then you shall be free indeed, and you shall not care for the vain words of men.

The Disciple

O Lord, it is true. I ask that it be with me as You say. Let your truth teach me. Let it guard me, and keep me safe to the end. Let it free me from all evil affection and badly ordered love, and I shall walk with You in great freedom of heart.

The Voice of Christ

I shall teach you those things which are right and pleasing to Me. Consider your sins with great displeasure and sorrow, and never think yourself to be someone because of your good works. You are truly a sinner. You are subject to many passions and entangled in them. Of yourself you always tend to nothing. You fall quickly, are quickly overcome, quickly troubled, and quickly undone. You have nothing in which you can glory, but you have many things for which you should think yourself vile, for you are much weaker than you can comprehend. Hence, let none of the things you do seem great to you. Let nothing seem important or precious or desirable except that which is everlasting. Let the eternal truth please you above all things, and let your extreme unworthiness always displease you. Fear nothing, hate nothing, and flee from nothing as you do your own vices and sins; these should be more unpleasant for you than any material losses.

Some men walk before Me without sincerity. Led on by a certain curiosity and arrogance, they wish to know My secrets and to understand the high things of God, to the neglect of themselves and their own salvation. Through their own pride and curiosity, and because I am against them, such men often fall into great temptations and sins.

Fear the judgments of God! Dread the wrath of the Almighty! Do not discuss the works of the Most High, but examine your sins -- in what serious things you have offended and how many good things you have neglected.

Some carry their devotion only in books, some in pictures, some in outward signs and figures. Some have Me on their lips when there is little of Me in their hearts. Others, indeed, with enlightened understanding and purified affections, constantly long for everlasting things; they are unwilling to hear of earthly affairs and only with reluctance do they serve the necessities of nature. These sense what the Spirit of truth speaks within them: for He teaches

them to despise earthly things and to love those of heaven, to neglect the world, and each day and night to desire heaven.

MEDITATION THROUGH THE JESUS PRAYER

Through the centuries, many disciples of Jesus have used a simple but profound prayer to center themselves in the life of devotion. The prayer, known as “The Jesus Prayer,” in its simplest form, goes as follows:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.

A variant version of the prayer adds the words “a sinner” at the end. Either form of the prayer can be used for times of meditation and centering oneself. The readings below can serve to give you more insight into the use and power of the prayer.

One of the simplest of all Christian prayers, this consists in a single brief sentence, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” Ten words in English, in other languages it is even shorter—in Greek and Russian, no more than seven words. Yet around those few words Orthodox over the centuries have built their spiritual life, and through this one prayer they have entered into the deepest mysteries of Christian knowledge.

Three things in the Jesus Prayer call for special comment, and help to account for its extraordinary wide appeal. First, the Jesus Prayer brings together, in one short sentence, two essential “moments” of Christian devotion; adoration and repentance. Adoration is expressed in the opening clause, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God”; repentance, in the prayer of mercy that follows. The glory of God and the sin of man—both are vividly present in the Prayer; it is an act of thanksgiving for the salvation that Jesus brings, and an expression of sorrow for the weakness of our response. The Prayer is both penitential and full of joy and loving confidence.

In the second place, it is an intensely Christological prayer—a prayer addressed to Jesus, concentrated upon the Person of the Incarnate Lord, emphasizing at once both His life on earth—:Jesus Christ”—and His divinity—“Son of God.”

...In the third place, the Invocation of the Name is a prayer of the utmost simplicity. It is a way of praying that anyone can adopt: no special knowledge is required and no elaborate preparation. As a recent writer puts it, all we must do is “simply begin”; “Before beginning to pronounce the Name of Jesus, establish peace and recollection within yourself and ask for the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Ghost.... Then simply begin.”

-- From *The Art of Prayer* by Igumen Chariton of Valamo

A short utterance like the Jesus Prayer—“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”—when repeated over and over, becomes part of the warp and woof of our being, altering our lives in ways we didn’t think possible. The Way of a Pilgrim shows us how this form of meditation can change us and as a result, alter both our circumstance and those of others. The beautiful thing about this particular type of meditation is that it can be practiced while we are typing a letter, cooking a meal, or driving the car. It can be as integral to us as breathing. Time assures a new depth and importance as we examine our lives in the light of such a prayer, for our priorities reorder ourselves according to our commitment to a truly devotional life.

-- From *Transcend* by Morton T. Kelsey

The Holiness of God and the Sinfulness of Humankind

Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern. In the first place, no one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he "lives and moves" (Acts 17:28). For quite clearly, the mighty gifts with which we are endowed are hardly from ourselves; indeed, our very being is nothing but subsistence in the one God. ...[Also], our very poverty better discloses the infinitude of benefits reposing in God. The miserable ruin, into which the rebellion of the first man cast us, especially compels us to look upward. ...We cannot seriously aspire to him before we begin to become displeased with ourselves.

...Again, it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself. For we always seem to ourselves righteous and upright and wise and holy – this pride is innate in all of us – unless by clear proofs we stand convinced of our own unrighteousness, foulness, folly, and impurity. Moreover, we are not thus convinced if we look merely to ourselves and not also to the Lord, which is the sole standard by which this judgment must be measured.

John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I, Sections 1 and 2

The Folly of Human Wisdom

All wicked men's pains and contrivance which they use to escape hell, while they continue to reject Christ, and so remain wicked men, do not secure them from hell one moment. Almost every natural man that hears of hell, flatters himself that he shall escape it; he depends upon himself for his own security; he flatters himself in what he has done, in what he is now doing, or what he intends to do. Every one lays out matters in his own mind how he shall avoid damnation, and flatters himself that he contrives well for himself, and that his schemes will not fail. They hear indeed that there are but few saved, and that the greater part of men that have died heretofore are gone to hell; but each one imagines that he lays out matters better for his own escape than others have done. He does not intend to come to that place of torment; he says within himself, that he intends to take effectual care, and to order matters so for himself as not to fail.

But the foolish children of men miserably delude themselves in their own schemes, and in confidence in their own strength and wisdom; they trust to nothing but a shadow. The greater part of those who heretofore have lived under the same means of grace, and are now dead, are undoubtedly gone to hell; and it was not because they were not as wise as those who are now alive: it was not because they did not lay out matters as well for themselves to secure their own escape. If we could speak with them, and inquire of them, one by one, whether they expected, when alive, and when they used to hear about hell, ever to be the subjects of misery: we doubtless, should hear one and another reply, "No, I never intended to come here: I had laid out matters otherwise in my mind; I thought I

should contrive well for myself -- I thought my scheme good. I intended to take effectual care; but it came upon me unexpected; I did not look for it at that time, and in that manner; it came as a thief -- Death outwitted me: God's wrath was too quick for me. Oh, my cursed foolishness! I was flattering myself, and pleasing myself with vain dreams of what I would do hereafter; and when I was saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction came upon me."

Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*

Cheap Grace versus Costly Grace

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian "conception" of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins. ...[N]o contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be *sought* again and again, the gift which must be *asked* for, the door at which a man must *knock*.

Such grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is *costly* because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is *grace* because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us.

Deitrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, pps. 45-48.

Repentance

The opening message of John the Baptist, who served as a herald for Jesus, was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This call to repentance was an urgent appeal to sinners. No one who refuses to repent can ever enter the kingdom of God. Repentance is a prerequisite, a necessary condition for salvation.

In Scripture, *repentance* means “to undergo a change of one’s mind.” This change of mind is not a mere switching of minor opinions, but of the entire direction of one’s life. It involves a radical turning *from* sin and *to* Christ.

Repentance is not the cause of a new birth or regeneration; it is the result or fruit of regeneration. Though repentance begins with regeneration, it is an attitude and action that must be repeated throughout the Christian life. As we continue to sin, we are called upon to repent as we are convicted of our sin by the Holy Spirit.

Theologians make a distinction between two kinds of repentance. The first is called *attrition*. Attrition is a false or spurious kind of repentance. It involves remorse caused by a fear of punishment or a loss of blessing. Every parent has witnessed attrition in a child when he is caught with his hand in the cookie jar. The child, fearing the paddle, cries, “I’m sorry, please don’t spank me!” These pleas coupled with crocodile tears are usually not signs of genuine remorse for wrongdoing. This was the kind of repentance Esau exhibited (Genesis 27:30-46). He was sorry not because he had sinned, but because he had lost his birthright. Attrition, then, is repentance motivated by an attempt to get a ticket out of hell or to otherwise avoid punishment.

Contrition on the other hand, is true and godly repentance. It is genuine. It includes a deep remorse for having offended God. The contrite person openly and fully confesses his sin with no attempt to excuse it or justify it. This acknowledgement of sin is coupled with a willingness to make restitution whenever possible and a resolve to turn away from sin. This is the spirit of repentance that David exhibited in Psalm 51. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – these, O God, You will not despise.” (Psalm 51:10, 17)

When repentance is offered to God in a spirit of true contrition, He promises to forgive us and to restore us to fellowship with Him: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*