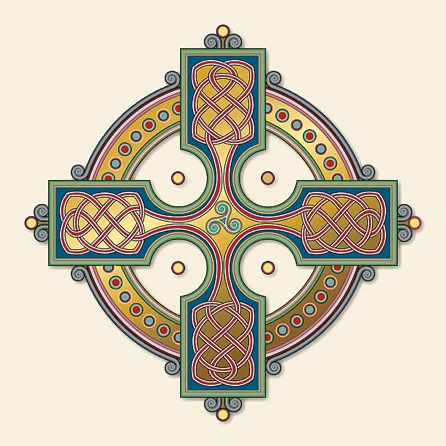
Ash Wednesday

*February 14, 2024*

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Greetings

Ash Wednesday originated in the first century Christian church as a time of fasting for “grievous sinners” who would then be reconciled to during communion on Maundy Thursday. During the 7th century, the duration of Lent was extended from 36 days to 40, to mirror the 40 days that Jesus wandered in the desert, fasting. So lent is a journey, a time to reflect on our mortality and our need for God. During Lent, you are invited to wander and search in faith. You don’t need to be certain, you are invited instead to be open, to seek and to find, to find God in the unexpected and to draw the divine more deeply into your life.

Take your time. Feel the fullness of the quiet. Be ready to absorb God’s presence here.

We begin by lighting a candle, saying:

*God, You are the Source of All Life.*

*God, You are Embodied as Christ.*

*God, You are the Animating Spirit.*

**Call to Worship:** *from Joel 2*

**One**: Yet even now, God calls: Return to me with all your heart.

**All: We rend our hearts and not our clothing. We return to you, God, for you are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.**  
**One:** Who knows whether you will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind you?

**All: We sanctify this journey; we call ourselves to seeking and prayer.**  
**One:** Therefore, we deepen our hearts in solitude even as we draw near to each other in community.

**All: There is a blessing upon us. We feel its wonder and its gravity. We embark on this spiritual journey to claim the blessing. Amen.**

**Community Prayer** *from Augustine of Hippo, 1st Century*

Breathe in us, O Holy Spirit, that our thoughts may all be holy.  
Act in us, O Holy Spirit, that our work, too, may be holy.  
Draw our hearts, O Holy Spirit, that we may love only what is holy.  
Strengthen us, O Holy Spirit, that we may defend all that is holy.Guard us, O Holy Spirit, that we myself may always be holy. Amen*.*

**Music**: The Gesualdo Six, from “The Lent Sessions”

*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1g\_KPXwtiLE*

**First Reading:** *from**Isaiah 58:6-12*  
  
Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?  
  
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; grace shall go before you, the radiance of the God shall be your halo.  
  
Then you shall call, and the God will answer; you shall cry for help, and will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.  
  
God will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

**Second Reading:** *from “Followers, Not Admirers” by Soren Kierkegaard*

It is well known that Christ consistently used the expression “follower.” He never asks for admirers, worshippers, or adherents. No, he calls disciples. It is not adherents of a teaching but followers of a life Christ is looking for.

Christ understood that being a “disciple” was in innermost and deepest harmony with what he said about himself. Christ claimed to *be* the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6). For this reason, he could never be satisfied with adherents who accepted his teaching—especially with those who in their lives ignored it or let things take their usual course. His whole life on earth, from beginning to end, was destined solely to have followers and make admirers impossible.

Christ came into the world with the purpose of saving, not instructing it. At the same time—as is implied in his saving work—he came to be the *pattern*, to leave footprints for the person who would join him, who would become a follower. This is why Christ was born and lived and died in lowliness.

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What then is the difference between an admirer and a follower? A follower is or strives to be what he or she admires. An admirer, however, keeps personally detached—and fails to see that what is admired involved a claim upon him or herself.

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The admirer never makes any true sacrifices and always plays it safe….Not so for the follower. The follower aspires with all her or his strength to become what she admires…Because of the follower’s life, it will become evident who the admirers are, for the admirer will become agitated with the follower.

**Music**: The Gesualdo Six, “Ave Verum Corpus” by William Byrd

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9P\_RyHWdVs

**Time of prayer and silent meditation**

**A Prayer for Ash Wednesday**

***by Cameron Bellm***

We forget sometimes that ashes come from fire, That this soft black powder was once a firm green frond, Bright and vibrant before it became dry and brittle, Stiff and fibrous before a flame transformed it into dust. Every living thing submits to change. Let’s not fear it.

From seed to plant, palm to ash, This bit of the earth smudged on our foreheads today Was carried lovingly in the hands of the Creator.

What fires will we step into this Lent? What new forms will our souls take When we encounter the holy blaze of the Living God?

We are—it is true—ash to ash and dust to dust, But whether in youth or in old age, in life or in death, Let us be assured, we are held, and we are God’s. Amen.



**Imposition of Ashes**

*May God burn away that which harms*

*May new life spring from these ashes.*

**Music**: The Gesualdo Six, “Forty Days and Forty Nights”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJXe6B7g5gE&list=PLJFPfaQpmP8hohU4Zx1K5v0BAPYvKrJQP



*art by Hildegard of Bingen*

*We end in silence.*

*Please leave when you are ready.*

*May the peace that passes understanding be with you.*