



ASH WEDNESDAY

Return to Me – A Reflection for Ash Wednesday Service in the Home
Centenary United Methodist Church

Wednesday, February 17, 2021

In the Gospel for Ash Wednesday, Jesus tells his followers not to show off their fasting and to pray in the inner rooms of their homes. These words take on new meaning this year - unable to be marked by ashes, restricted to our homes, our prayers are private but no less fervent.

This year we mark our hearts and not our heads. May the loss of our traditional Ash Wednesday observance be the first thing we let go in deepening our Lenten journey.

Remember the call to return to God. This service has been prepared for you to use in your home. We hope that it will be a guide for a meaningful time of preparation for the season of Lent.

Resources used for this service: Discipleship Resources; UM BOW; chausa.org.;
<http://alivenow.upperroom.org/2011/01/25/lent-101/>

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
And also with you.

Call to Worship

We enter the season of Lent wounded.
Wounded too deeply to utter a sound.
And we stand pressing our hand to the pain.
And God comes to us saying,
"Show me where you are hurting."
"No. I can't let go. It hurts."
"I love you. I can heal you. I will restore you."
And we ease our hand away.
God comes with soothing balms.
God answers our fears.
God, we give you our tears:
tears that are so old they no longer have names.
"And I hear you. I will answer you.
You will be restored. You will be set free."

Opening Prayer:

**We turn our faces toward you
in a special way today, O God,
seeking wisdom for the Lenten journey ahead
and for the paths we walk in life.
Center our spirits this day.
for an inward journey of reconciliation
to our true selves,
and thus to you.
In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN.**

Old Testament – Joel 2:12-13 A reading from the prophet Joel

"Even now, says the LORD,
return to me with your whole heart,
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;
Rend your hearts, not your garments,
and return to the LORD, your God."

Epistle – I Corinthians 5:20-6:3

²⁰ So we are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is negotiating with you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, "Be reconciled to God!" ²¹ God caused the one who didn't know sin to be sin for our sake so that through him we could become the righteousness of God. **6** ¹ Since we work together with him, we

are also begging you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² He says, *I listened to you at the right time, and I helped you on the day of salvation.*^[a] Look, now is the right time! Look, now is the day of salvation!

Gospel- Matthew 6: 1-18

Showy religion

6 “Be careful that you don’t practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

² “Whenever you give to the poor, don’t blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people. I assure you, that’s the only reward they’ll get. ³ But when you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing ⁴ so that you may give to the poor in secret. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

Showy prayer

⁵ “When you pray, don’t be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that’s the only reward they’ll get. ⁶ But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

Proper prayer

⁷ “When you pray, don’t pour out a flood of empty words, as the Gentiles do. They think that by saying many words they’ll be heard. ⁸ Don’t be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask. ⁹ Pray like this:

Our Father who is in heaven,
uphold the holiness of your name.

¹⁰ Bring in your kingdom
so that your will is done on earth as it’s done in heaven.

¹¹ Give us the bread we need for today.

¹² Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you,
just as we also forgive those who have wronged us.

¹³ And don’t lead us into temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.

¹⁴ “If you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you don’t forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your sins.

Showy fasting

¹⁶ “And when you fast, don’t put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They distort their faces so people will know they are fasting. I assure you that they have their reward. ¹⁷ When you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. ¹⁸ Then you won’t look like you are fasting to people, but only to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Reflection

God asks for our whole hearts, with our grief, our sacrifice, and our sorrow. Breathe deeply.

- Visualize yourself. How do you come before God this year on Ash Wednesday? Take that posture that most represents your inner spirit.
- In the inner room of your heart, ask yourself what limits do you put on God’s love of you?
- What is standing between you and the God who knows and loves you?

- How will you use this Lent to remove your limitations on God's love? How will you use this Lent to move closer to God who made, loves and cares for you?

As we begin our walk with Jesus to the cross and resurrection, we unite our mortality and limits to Christ's own suffering and passion in order that we might enjoy his divine life as well. To mark the beginning of your journey this Lent, trace a cross on your forehead and repeat the ancient words, **You are dust and to dust you shall return.**

Prayer

God, you chose to limit yourself for the sake of your people. Let me walk you this Lent as I face my own limitations and seek to be your presence in the world. Create in me a clean heart that I might know, love, and serve you better through my service of others. Amen.

TOP TEN THINGS YOU CAN TRY FOR THE LENTEN SEASON:

- 10. Try an electronic fast.** Give up TV, Facebook, texting, tweeting, e-mail and all things electronic for one day every week. (or everyday of Lent!) Use the time to read & pray.
- 9. Start a prayer rhythm.** Say a prayer every time you brush your teeth, hear an ambulance, or check your e-mail. Before you text someone, pray for them.
- 8. Read one chapter in the Bible each day.** (Matthew's a good book to start with. Psalms, too.)
- 7. Forgive someone who doesn't deserve it (maybe even yourself.)**
- 6. Give up soft drinks, fast food, tea, or coffee.** Give the money you save to an organization making a positive difference in your community.
- 5. Create a daily quiet time.** Spend 30 minutes a day in silence and prayer.
- 4. Cultivate a life of gratitude.** Write someone a thank you letter each week and be aware of how many people have helped you along the way.
- 3. Be kind to someone each day.**
- 2. Pray for others you see** as you walk to and from classes or drive to and from work or running errands.
- 1. Volunteer one hour or more each week** with a local shelter, tutoring program, nursing home, prison ministry or mission / community outreach.

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