



ASH
WEDNESDAY
WORSHIP
SERVICE

FEBRUARY 17, 2010 • 6:30 P.M.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. By the fourth century, the Western church determined that the Lenten period of fasting and renewal should correspond to Christ's forty-day fast 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. Thus Ash Wednesday became the day that marked the beginning of the Lenten renewal.

The aim of Ash Wednesday worship is threefold...

- to meditate on our mortality, sinfulness, and need of a savior;
- to renew our commitment to daily repentance in the Lenten season and in all of life; and
- to remember with confidence and gratitude that Christ has conquered death and sin.

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

Orchestra

OPENING MEDITATION

Michael McKnight

WELCOME *(read silently)*

Welcome to a season of self-examination. This is a time to ponder the depth of God's love and lengths to which some have gone to bring awareness of that transforming love into the world. It is also a time to ponder what God wills for us and the world; which the Bible names as justice and Jesus called "life abundant." Finally, it is a time to ponder what God's love and God's will for us call us to do. How are we to live? How are we to treat the earth, ourselves, and our neighbors? Let us open ourselves to God's presence, knowing that God is here and everywhere, and that God speaks to us in our inmost being. Let us open ourselves to God's wisdom and guidance, trusting that God will lead us in the way of truth. Through hardship, affliction, and calamity, we trust in the transformative love of God to steady us. Prepare yourselves for a journey of the heart. Be open to the grace that enables your growth. With gratitude and wonder, receive the Divine Love in your minds and hearts and souls.

* HYMN

No. 488 "Just as I Am"

WOODWORTH

ANTHEM

“Create in Me a Clean Heart” (L. Bannister)

Chancel Choir

SCRIPTURE READING

Psalm 51:1-17

Steve Prevatte

CHILDREN’S WORSHIP TIME

Steve Harding

CALL TO CONFESSION *(read in unison)*

Beth Thompson

God, this is a hard time. The focus of Lent is on the pain and suffering of Jesus and our own need for penitence. It is a time of gathering darkness. But we would rather skip this part and go straight to Easter. We would rather ignore the suffering—in you and in the world—and avoid the hard work of true self-examination. Forgive us for wanting this to be bright and painless and easy, when we know that Jesus did not take the easy way, but chose the path of the Cross. Teach us the true meaning of penitence, so that we use this Lenten season to humbly seek a clean heart and a renewed spirit. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

HYMN

No. 324 “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”

HAMBURG

* RESPONSE TIME

Greg Rogers

During this time of response you are invited to:

- remain in your seat and reflect and pray
- join the Emerge musicians by singing.
- kneel and pray at one of the pew kneelers in either side section of the sanctuary.
- receive the imposition of ashes from one of our ministers.
- speak or pray with one of our ministers, and/or receive the anointing of oil for physical, emotional, relational, or spiritual healing.
- light a candle and/or write a prayer request at the stations by the rear windows.
- participate in the five stations (clay, water, oil, ashes, and bread) located around the sanctuary

BENEDICTION

Greg Rogers

You have begun the steps toward the cross. Now step out into the world, offering hope and healing love to all. Follow our Lord’s example of prayer and fasting, and may we obey Him with willing hearts and serve one another in holy love. Go in peace. Amen.

CLAY



READ

Jeremiah 18:1-6

¹The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²“Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” ³So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. ⁴The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

⁵Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁶“Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

REFLECT

One of the ways in which sin is described in the Bible is as a “hardness of heart.” Do you ever feel that your heart is hard, that it is inflexible or judgmental? Do you keep your guard up in your relationships with others and/or with God? Reflect on the way in which this is true.

RESPOND

Take a piece of clay. Warm it in your hands and knead it until it becomes pliable. Give it a new shape – perhaps a small bowl which could symbolize receptivity to God and to God’s forgiving love.

Note: There are moist wipes available near the stations to clean your hands and plastic bags to store you clay item for the journey home. The clay is air-dry.

WATER



READ

Psalm 51:10-12

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

REFLECT

One of the ways in which we can understand Lent is to see it as “Spring Cleaning.” Just as we will clean our houses in preparation for a visit from a special guest, so we take time to examine our lives in preparation for our encounter with the risen Christ at Easter. Are there closets where you store past resentments? Clean them out! Is there a sink full of dishes with the residue of negative behaviors? Start scrubbing!

RESPOND

Dip your hands into the water in the bowl on the table before you, and wipe your hands dry on the cloth provided. As you do so, reflect on what your life could be like, thoroughly rinsed with God’s love. Take a river stone (that has been polished and cleaned by time and water) as a reminder of God’s cleansing love.

OIL



READ

Lamentations 3:19-23

¹⁹The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall!

²⁰My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.

²¹But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end;

²³they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

REFLECT

The author of Lamentations spends most of his time complaining, both about the world's afflictions and his own. One thought gives him or her peace: the steadfast love of God. The knowledge of God's unshakable love, even in the midst of trouble, is finally the grease which makes the squeaky wheel of lamentation fall silent.

RESPOND

Dip your finger in the oil in the bowl on the table before you and smooth it onto the back of your hand. As you do, reflect on the parts of your life which are stiff and squeaky – places where you are stuck, places which give you cause for continual complaint. Consider how the love of God might lubricate these parts of your life, renewing them, making them usable in a way they have not been before.

ASHES



READ

Genesis 3:19c

¹⁹ “...you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

REFLECT

Ash Wednesday once began a season of 40 days of deadly serious penance. It included a type of fasting far stricter than most diets today, embracing the absence of all life's pleasures and enjoyments. There is evidence that marking the face or body with ashes began in Gaul in the 6th century and was at first confined to public penitents doing penance for grave and notorious sin, whom the clergy tried to comfort and encourage by submitting themselves to the same public humiliation. For our spiritual ancestors, the people of Jewish and other Near Eastern cultures, wearing ashes was a sign of mourning and lamenting. Ashes were usually associated with sackcloth, which was the clothing worn to mourn the death of a beloved or to lament a personal or communal disaster. Humans are the only species we know of who are capable of contemplating their own death. Yet few of us do. Ash Wednesday challenges us to reflect on our own death so that we can truly embrace life. The mark of ashes reminds us that only by a Christ-like death can we experience the promise of Easter's life.

RESPOND

Part I: Use the charcoal pencil to make a cross on the back of your hand. Press firmly. (It may work best in the same spot where you have already rubbed in the oil.) Reflect on the gift of life over death symbolized by the cross. Offer this prayer: “O God, may I often remember the symbol of the cross upon my hand and say, ‘I am dust that will return to dust, yet in You I trust.’”

Part II: Go to one of the stations where a minister will impose the ashes by making a cross on your forehead.

FOOD

ONE DOLLAR A DAY



READ

Matthew 6:16-21

¹⁶“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

REFLECT

The fast God desires breaks open and purifies the heart, cleanses our self-absorption, and redirects us towards alleviating injustice and human suffering (Is. 58:6-8). But too often the tradition of Lenten fasting turns into an ego-driven challenge. What can I give up for seven weeks that will make me feel better about myself? However, what good is it to give up chocolate, sodas, or ESPN only to pick them up on Easter morning? How easy it is to self-design a fast so it's all about “me.”

RESPOND

Use the supplies on the table to create a bank you can use this Lenten Season to collect a dollar a day to be used with Stop Hunger Now and Operation InAsMuch to provide food for children who do not have enough to eat.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

The imposition of ashes is often a central part of the Ash Wednesday worship service. Ashes have a long history in biblical and church traditions. In Scripture ashes or dust symbolize frailty or death (Genesis 18:27), sadness or mourning (Esther 4:3), judgment (Lamentations 3:16), and repentance (Jonah 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 symbol appropriate for Lent. In Christ's passion we see God's judgment on evil; on our penitence we express sorrow and repentance for our sins; in our rededication we show that we are purified and renewed.

During the service worshipers receive on their foreheads ashes from burned palms. A minister marks the forehead of each worshiper with the shape of the cross, often saying "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return."



ANOINTING

James 5:13-16

¹³Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. ¹⁴Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

You are invited to go to one of the two prayer stations where a minister will be available to pray with and for you for physical emotional, relational, or spiritual healing, and to anoint you with oil, if you desire.



Ideas for Children

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent.

Lent is the 40 days (not counting Sundays) before Easter.

The number 40 reminds us of many things:
the 40 days it rained when Noah was on the ark;
the 40 years Moses wandered in the wilderness;
the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert.

During Lent we remember the things we do that make God unhappy and promise to do better.

During Lent we can remember how much God loves us.

God loves us so much that he sent his Son Jesus to save us from our sins.

Many people give something up for Lent

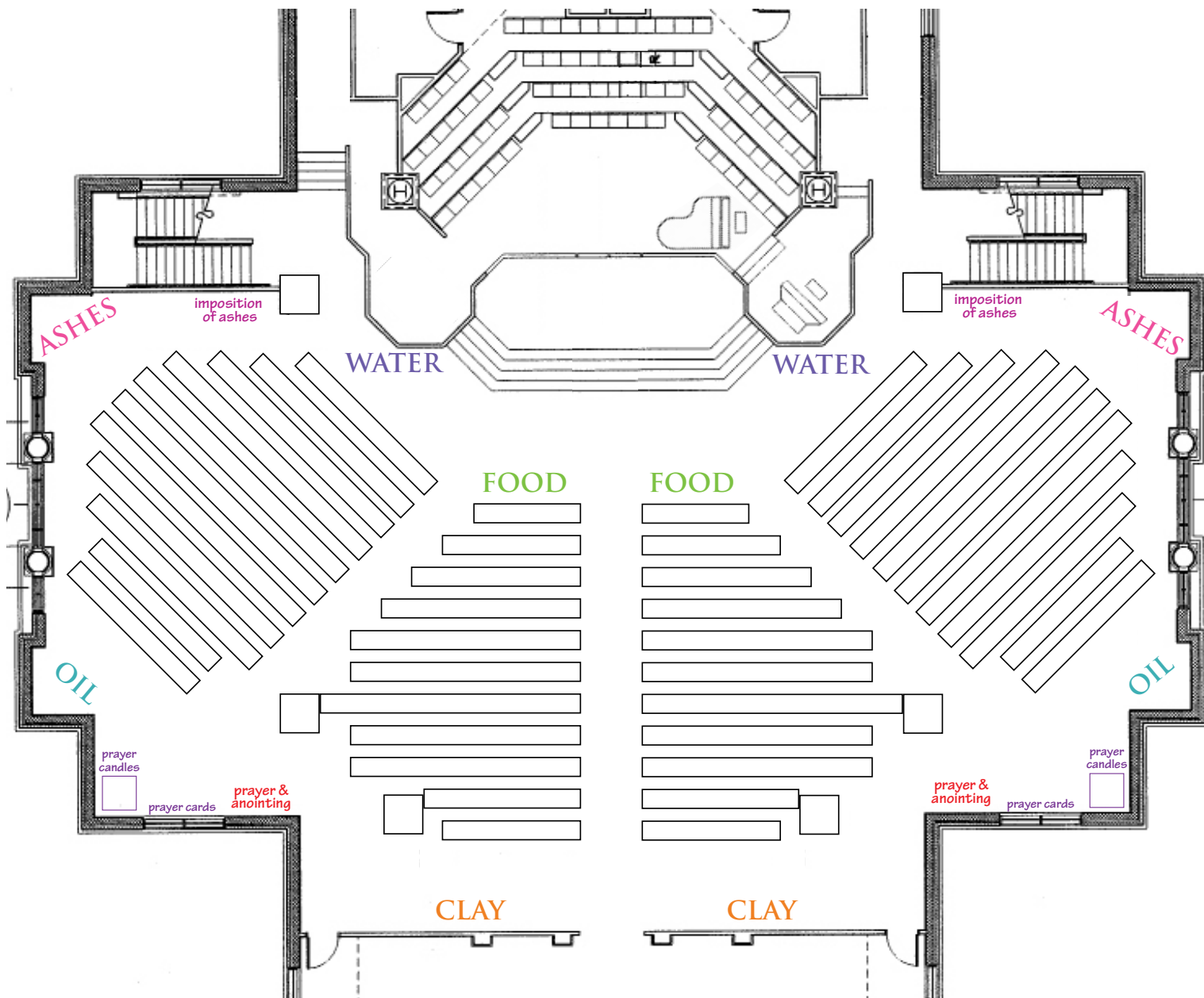
Some people may give up watching television or something they like to do. Often these people will use the time they would have been doing an activity and do something for God instead.

Often people may give up eating some type of food they really like. Often these people will take the money they would have spent on the food and spend it to help others.



Ashes

During the service tonight you will have a chance for a minister to use ashes to put a mark on your forehead or hand in the shape of a cross. The ashes are from palm leaves that have been burned. Years ago people would put ashes on their skin and wear simple clothes when they were very sad. We wear the ashes today to remind us of things we may do to make God sad. The shape of the cross reminds us of Jesus dying on the cross.



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