

# Ash Wednesday Service

## Imposition of Ashes

First United Methodist Church of Riverside

12:00 p.m.      The Rev. Beverly Devine

### WELCOME

#### OPENING PRAYER (Responsive)

(Leader) Holy God,

There are days when it is harder to pray than others; days when the disappointments of yesterday still linger in the memory as the weight of the day ahead feels too heavy to bear.

**(People) And yet, these are the days we need prayer the most.**

(L) There are seasons in a relationship where it is harder to love than others; seasons where the unbridled joy and endless hope have been harnessed by the realities of careers, parenting, debt, aging, disappointments, and growing apart.

**(P) And yet, these are the seasons we need to love one another the most.**

(L) There are times in our lives of faith when it is harder to remain faith-filled than others; times when the dark night of the soul remains through sunrises too numerous to count, and the hope of relief seems afar off.

**(P) And yet, these are the times when we need our faith the most.**

**(All) Speak to us anew in days, seasons, and times that are parched and passionless, and refresh the dry places in our lives. Speak to us in the deep, secret places where others cannot enter, and your voice reverberates our entire being. Speak to us anew, Holy God. Amen.**

### THE ORIGINS OF LENT

The early Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church that before the Easter celebration there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation.

During this season, converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins and had separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness and restored to participation in the life of the Church.

In this way the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith. I invite you, therefore, to observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word. To make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature, let us now bow before our Creator and Redeemer.

**SCRIPTURE Psalm 51:1-17 (The Message)**

<sup>1-3</sup> Generous in love—God, give grace!

Huge in mercy—wipe out my bad record.

Scrub away my guilt,

soak out my sins in your laundry.

I know how bad I've been;

my sins are staring me down.

<sup>4-6</sup> You're the One I've violated, and you've seen

it all, seen the full extent of my evil.

You have all the facts before you;

whatever you decide about me is fair.

I've been out of step with you for a long time,

in the wrong since before I was born.

What you're after is truth from the inside out.

Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life.

<sup>7-15</sup> Soak me in your laundry and I'll come out clean,

scrub me and I'll have a snow-white life.

Tune me in to foot-tapping songs,

set these once-broken bones to dancing.

Don't look too close for blemishes,

give me a clean bill of health.

God, make a fresh start in me,

shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.

Don't throw me out with the trash,

or fail to breathe holiness in me.

Bring me back from gray exile,

put a fresh wind in my sails!

Give me a job teaching rebels your ways

so the lost can find their way home.

Commute my death sentence, God, my salvation God,

and I'll sing anthems to your life-giving ways.

Unbutton my lips, dear God;

I'll let loose with your praise.

**16-17** Going through the motions doesn't please you,  
 a flawless performance is nothing to you.  
 I learned God-worship  
 when my pride was shattered.  
 Heart-shattered lives, ready for love,  
 don't for a moment escape God's notice.

### **UNISON PRAYER**

**Dust and ashes touch my face,  
 mark my failure and my falling.**  
**Holy Spirit, come, walk with me tomorrow,  
 take me as your disciple,  
 washed and wakened by your calling.**  
**Take me by the hand and lead me,  
 lead me through the desert sands,  
 bring me to living water, Holy Spirit, come.**

**Dust and ashes soil my hands -  
 greed of market, pride of nation.**  
**Holy Spirit, come, walk with me tomorrow  
 as I pray and struggle  
 through the meshes of oppression.**  
**Take me by the hand and lead me,  
 lead me through the desert sands,  
 bring me living water, Holy Spirit, come.**

**Dust and ashes choke my tongue  
 in the wasteland of depression.**  
**Holy Spirit, come, walk with me tomorrow  
 through all gloom and grieving  
 to the paths of resurrection.**  
**Take me by the hand and lead me,  
 lead me through the desert sands,  
 bring me living water, Holy Spirit, come.**

### **THANKSGIVING PRAYER OVER THE ASHES**

(Pastor) Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. Grant that these ashes may be to us a sign of our mortality and penitence, so that we may remember that only by your gracious gift are we given everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Savior.  
**(All) Amen.**

## INVITATION TO RECEIVE ASHES

I invite you to come now to receive the mark of ashes on your forehead, a sign that from dust you came and to dust you will return. This is the beginning. Our willingness to come forward, acknowledge our brokenness and wear the mark of repentance is the first step to opening the floodgates of the waters of justice and righteousness in our church, our community, and our world.

## IMPOSITION OF ASHES

### AFFIRMATION PRAYER: "Ashes"

We close with poem by the Rev. LaTrelle Miller Easterling, a Bishop in the United Methodist Church.

I invite you to stand as you are comfortable and make a tight fist with your hands. Then open your palms slowly in front of you as the prayer poem is read, imaging that what is dry and parched will be renewed in this Lent journey by the waters of grace that will flow into and through you.

**As the ashes are spread down my forehead  
I am reminded of the gift of grace you endured  
for our new beginning.**

**You were deserted, but you did not desert us.**

**You were despised, but you did not despise humanity.**

**You were ridiculed, but you did not ridicule the guilty.**

**You withstood the darkness to offer us light.**

**I receive the ashes. I draw closer to you.**

**I receive the ashes.**

**As the ashes are spread across my forehead**

**I am reminded of your love for all people.**

**Your love is from everlasting to everlasting.**

**Your love knows no worthy or unworthy.**

**Your love cannot be bought through wealth**

**nor acquired through fame.**

**Your love is complete.**

**I receive the ashes.**

**I draw closer to humankind.**

**I receive the ashes.**

**As I wear these ashes on my forehead**

**may they make a lasting impression upon my heart**

**to be more emptied of self, and more centered in you.**

**I receive the ashes. I walk the path toward your waters of renewal.**

**I receive the ashes. Amen.**

**HYMN #378** "Amazing Grace" by John Newton

**1. Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!**

**I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.**

**2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;  
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.**

**3. Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come;  
'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.**

**4. The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures;  
he will my shield and portion be, as long as life endures.**

### **BENEDICTION**

As counterintuitive as it may seem, may the work of recognizing our brokenness be the opening for wholeness. Remember, you were made from dust and to dust you shall return. Let the act of seeing yourself as just one of all the mortals walking around trying to make sense of their lives, and relationships, transform you and move you to compassion for yourself, and others, so that justice might flow.

**Amen.**