

Ash Wednesday Playlist

Light a Candle

Silent Meditation

"Lent marks the forty days leading up to Easter, mirroring the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness. It is a practice that began during the 4th century as a way to prepare Christians for the holiest days of the year.

During Lent, we ask God to show us the world as it is.
We begin with the reality of our finitude rubbed into our foreheads on Ash Wednesday - from dust we were made, to dust we shall return. Then, we walk through that reality in a kind of dress rehearsal. It's the downward slope of God-the Great Descent, where the whole Church walks toward the cross.

This is a time when we all get a minute to tell the truth: Life is so beautiful and life is so hard. For everyone.

Of course, the cross is not the end of the story, but this season of grief is carved out to acknowledge the reality of Christ's sacrifice. And the reality of suffering that so many of our circumstances reflect too - our own pain and grief and despair. Easter is coming, yes. But for now, we sit in the ashes of our broken dreams and broken hearts, knowing that God sits here with us."

- Kate Bowler, A Good Enough Lent

Welcome

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

- Matthew 11:28-30

Seeking: Honest Questions

What questions are you carrying, wrestling, or avoiding about faith and life as you walk into Lent this year?

Call to Worship

We gather together at the edge of a new season.
We stand together on the cusp of something new.
Will we wade into self-reflection?
Will we invite honesty to dance?
Will we listen for God's invitation?
Will we seek deeper faith?
What kind of fast do we choose? What kind of faith will we build?
We gather together at the edge of a new season.
Listen, God is speaking.

Poem

"WHITE OWL FLIES INTO AND OUT OF THE FIELD"
+ Mary Oliver

Coming down
out of the freezing sky
with its depths of light,
like an angel,
or a buddha with wings,
it was beautiful
and accurate,
striking the snow and whatever was there
with a force that left the imprint
of the tips of its wings —
five feet apart — and the grabbing
thrust of its feet,
and the indentation of what had been running
through the white valleys
of the snow —
and then it rose, gracefully,
and flew back to the frozen marshes,

to lurk there,
like a little lighthouse,
in the blue shadows —
so I thought:
maybe death
isn't darkness, after all,
but so much light
wrapping itself around us —
as soft as feathers —
that we are instantly weary
of looking, and looking, and shut our eyes,

not without amazement,
and let ourselves be carried,
as through the translucence of mica,
to the river
that is without the least dapple or shadow —
that is nothing but light — scalding, aortal light —
in which we are washed and washed
out of our bones.

Prayer of Confession

Friends and neighbors, in the middle of our busy week, we pause to observe Ash Wednesday together as a faith community.

We come to remember that God made us from fragile, blessed dust
And breathes through us the breath of life and love.

From dust we are created in God's image and to God's good dust we shall return.

With dust and oil we claim the mark of God's beloved creature.

We affirm that God's steadfast love endures forever. From dust we came, to dust we will return; but God's steadfast love endures forever.

Here we are as we confess to our brokenness; to the ways we wound our lives, the lives of others, and the life of the world.

-Silence for Confession and Personal Reflection-

Words of Forgiveness

All: Restore us, O God, open the gate to your kingdom here and now and turn us to follow your path again, to proclaim your love that endures forever.

Scripture

Let us open our heart, souls, bodies, and minds to receive what the Spirit is inviting us into from the book of Isaiah 58:

"Shout! A full-throated shout!
Hold nothing back—a trumpet-blast shout!
Tell my people what's wrong with their lives,
face my family Jacob with their sins!
They're busy, busy, busy at worship,
and love studying all about me.
To all appearances they're a nation of right-living people—
law-abiding, God-honoring.
They ask me, 'What's the right thing to do?'
and love having me on their side.
But they also complain,
'Why do we fast and you don't look our way?
Why do we humble ourselves and you don't even notice?'
"Well, here's why:
"The bottom line on your 'fast days' is profit.
You drive your employees much too hard.
You fast, but at the same time you bicker and fight.
You fast, but you swing a mean fist.
The kind of fasting you do
won't get your prayers off the ground.
Do you think this is the kind of fast day I'm after:
a day to show off humility?
To put on a pious long face
and parade around solemnly in black?
Do you call that fasting,
a fast day that I, God, would like?
"This is the kind of fast day I'm after:

to break the chains of injustice,
get rid of exploitation in the workplace,
free the oppressed,
cancel debts.
What I'm interested in seeing you do is:
sharing your food with the hungry,
inviting the homeless poor into your homes,
putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,
being available to your own families.
Do this and the lights will turn on,
and your lives will turn around at once.
Your righteousness will pave your way.
The God of glory will secure your passage.
Then when you pray, God will answer.
You'll call out for help and I'll say, 'Here I am.'

For the Word of God in Scripture
For the Word of God among us
For the Word of God within us
ALL: Thanks be to God!

Preparing for the Imposition of the Ashes

There will be an opportunity to receive ashes at the Sunday, February 26, worship service.

On Ash Wednesday we have the opportunity to be marked by ashes. Ashes are a symbol of our humble humanity and of our tie to an earth which is finite and fractured. Yet ashes are also a symbol of cleansing and rebirth and sign that, in Christ, we are made new. As we receive ashes, God invites us to turn toward God (which is the meaning of repentance) in order to receive from God a renewed heart and a new Spirit.

- Dan Schifeling

Let us pray

Gracious God, you created us out of the dust of the earth and breathed into us the breath of life. By your hand we live and to your hands we return when all our days are done. Grant that the awareness of our mortality may lead us not to fear, but to faith. In our weakness teach us to look to you for strength, in our failures to turn to you and find forgiveness, and in our dying to await the gift of everlasting life. Amen.

- Katherine Lee Baker

Imposition of Ashes

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

A Blessing for Ash Wednesday

by Jan Richardson

All those days
you felt like dust,
like dirt,
as if all you had to do
was turn your face
toward the wind
and be scattered
to the four corners
or swept away
by the smallest breath
as insubstantial –
did you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?
This is the day
we freely say
we are scorched.
This is the hour
we are marked
by what has made it
through the burning.

This is the moment
we ask for the blessing
that lives within
the ancient ashes,
that makes its home
inside the soil of
this sacred earth.
So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.
Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less
than we are
but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,
within the dirt,
within the stuff
of which the world
is made
and the stars that blaze
in our bones
and the galaxies that spiral
inside the smudge
we bear.
—Jan Richardson from Circle of Grace