

A GATHERING FOR ASH WEDNESDAY
February 17, 2021
American Lutheran Church, Filley, Nebraska
LuRae Hallstrom, Pastor
Worship Leader: Pastor Fred Andersen

(Please enter and leave the sanctuary in silence this evening.)

INVITATION TO LENT

P: Friends in Christ, today with the whole church we enter the time of remembering Jesus' passover from death to life, and our life in Christ is renewed.

We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance and for God's mercy. We are created to experience joy in communion with God, to love one another, and to live in harmony with creation. But our sinful rebellion separates us from God, our neighbors, and creation, so that we do not enjoy the life our creator intended.

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to a discipline that contends against evil and resists whatever leads us away from love of God and neighbor. I invite you, therefore, to the discipline of Lent—self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love—strengthened by the gifts of word and sacrament. Let us continue our journey through these forty days to the great Three Days of Jesus' death and resurrection.

RESPONSIVE READING OF PSALM 51:1-17

P: Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love.

C: Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins.

P: Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.

C: For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night.

P: Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight.

C: You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.

P: For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.

C: But you desire honesty from the womb, teaching me wisdom even there.

P: Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

C: Oh, give me back my joy again; I have been broken—now let me rejoice.

P: Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt.

C: Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.

P: Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.

C: Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.

P: Then I will teach your ways to rebels, and they will return to you.

C: Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves; then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.

P: Unseal my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may praise you.

C: You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering.

P: The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: Let us pray...

C: Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and our neighbors. Call forth our prayers and acts of kindness, and strengthen us to face our mortality with confidence in the mercy of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

READING OF GOD'S WORD:

The First Lesson: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

¹Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near—²a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come.

¹²Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. ¹⁴Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God?

¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy.

¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

The Second Lesson: II Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10

^{20b}We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. ^{6:1}As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Holy Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²"So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

HYMN OF THE DAY: **“O Jesus, I Have Promised”***(Please hum or sing softly)*

1. O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end. Remain forever near me, my master and my friend. I shall not fear the battle if you are by my side. Nor wander from the pathway if you will be my guide.

4. O Jesus, you have promised to all who follow you. That where you are in glory, Your servant shall be, too. And Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end. Oh, give me grace to follow my master and my friend.

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CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

All: 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 Jesus Christ. Amen.

P: the truth is this: God’s love and mercy are never-ending. God knows us in our inward being; God cleanses us from our sins and shortcomings, and restores to us the joy of salvation. As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

P: Risen Lord and Savior, present among us with the wealth of your love. Cleanse us from sin and give us the faith to offer our praise and grow in your grace.

All: Amen.

P: It is indeed right and good to give you thanks and praise, almighty God and everlasting Father, through Jesus Christ your Son. For in these forty days you lead us into the desert of repentance that through a pilgrimage of prayer and discipline we may grow in grace and learn to be your people once again. Through fasting, prayer and acts of service you bring us back to your generous heart. Through study of your holy word you open our eyes to your presence in the world and free our hands to welcome others into the radiant splendor of your love. As we prepare to celebrate the Easter feast with joyful hearts and minds we bless you for your mercy and join with saints and angels forever praising you and saying:

All: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

LORD'S PRAYER

DISTRIBUTION

As Pastor says: "The body of Christ, given for you", you are invited to eat the bread. As Pastor says, "The blood of Christ, shed for you", you are invited to drink the grape juice.

POST COMMUNION BLESSING

P: May the spirit within us

C: be a source of healing and consolation.

P: May the spirit within us

C: strengthen us when we feel weak, warm us when we are cold-hearted, bend us when we are stubborn, move us when we are uncaring, guide us in the way of love.

P: May the spirit within us

C: shine in all we do. Amen.

P: May God who has called us forth from the dust of the earth, and claimed us as children of the light, strengthen you on your journey into life renewed. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord's face shine upon you with grace and mercy. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

C: Amen.

P: Marked with the cross of Christ, go forth to love and serve the Lord.

(All leave in silence.)

Please leave your offerings in the offering plate at the back of church following worship.

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

ECCLESIASTES 3:20

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WORSHIP HELPERS:

Council – Dave Norton-President, Virgil Jobman-Vice President, Carol Frerichs-Secretary, Brenda Hippen-Treasurer, Linda Searcey-at large

PowerPoint Preparer/Presenter – Brenda Hippen

Audio/Video – Brad Frerichs

Accompanist – Carlyne Wolken