

Ash Wednesday At Home

February 17th, 2021 – *Inland & Seven Rivers Districts*

Welcome

Welcome, friends, to this Ash Wednesday worship service, which is a collaboration between the Inland and Seven Rivers Districts (along with a huge assist from Cheney UMC).

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, the period of forty days of preparation for Easter (not counting the Sundays which are “little Easters” to mark our journey). Although we usually experience some discomfort with the notion that we are but “ashes and dust” and to ashes and dust we shall return, after nearly a year of being under the shadow of a viral pandemic this year seems like an appropriate time to ritualize the fact that we are finite and mortal beings in need of a loving and graceful God.

On behalf of my colleague, Joanne, I can say that we are glad to offer this resource to any around our Greater Northwest Area who are able to benefit. I would like to offer a huge “thank you” to Cheney UMC (especially their pastor, Rev. Alissa Bertsch and their “tech guru” Rev. Dale Cockrum for their incredible work in helping pull all of these pieces together.)

Thank you also to all the folks who have contributed to this service from both districts (and even beyond). May this service be a meaningful step on your Lenten journey in 2021.

– from Rev. Gregg Sealey, District Superintendent and Missional Strategist, Inland District

Introduction to the Service

I add my welcome to that of DS Gregg Sealey and it is good along with all who have contributed to this service to observe the beginning of Lent with you.

Toward the end of the service, we will observe an “act of penitence”. If you have ashes, you may want to use them. Remember to never mix ashes with water – the chemical reaction is caustic. Either use them just as ashes or mix in a little oil. Or you may have other symbols or elements provided by your church. Or you may just use a little bit of oil to mark your forehead with the sign of the cross.

If not, I invite you to pause for a moment and gather a little bit of soil in a bowl - perhaps from your garden or flowerbed or even a potted plant. Have a small glass of water ready. During the service we will be mixing the soil of the earth with the water of life to form the mud from which we were created. When you are ready, resume your time of worship.

And now, I invite you to prepare your body and soul for the beginning of the Lenten season. Settle yourself in, plant your feet firmly upon the floor, breathe out all of your tension, and breathe in the Holy Spirit. Breathe out, and breathe in. Breathe out...and breathe in. Let us worship.

- Rev. Joanne Coleman Campbell, DS and Missional Strategist, Seven Rivers District

Call to Worship with "Jesus, Remember Me"

Response:

488 Jesus, Remember Me

The image shows a musical score for the hymn 'Jesus, Remember Me'. It is numbered 488. The score is written for two voices (Soprano and Alto) and two parts of piano accompaniment (Right and Left Hand). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: 'Je - sus, re - mem - ber me when you come in - to your king - dom.' The score is repeated twice. At the bottom, it credits the words to Luke 23:42 and the music to Jacques Berthier and the Community of Taizé, 1981. It also includes a copyright notice for 1981 Les Presses de Taizé, by permission of G.I.A. Publications, Inc. There is a small logo that says 'REMEMBER ME Irr.' in the bottom right corner.

Je - sus, re - mem - ber me when you come in - to your king - dom.

Je - sus, re - mem - ber me when you come in - to your king - dom.

WORDS: Luke 23:42
MUSIC: Jacques Berthier and the Community of Taizé, 1981
Music © 1981 Les Presses de Taizé, by permission of G.I.A. Publications, Inc.

REMEMBER ME
Irr.

In the quiet of this time, in the comfort of your presence we come to you, O Lord.
We come for peace; we come for comfort; we come for forgiveness and love. **(Response)**

(Silence)

Like the sound of falling snow, in the solace of silence we come to you, O Lord.
We come for acceptance; we come in hunger for community; we come for forgiveness and love.

(Response)

(Silence)

In the serenity of sunrise and sunset, in the restfulness of worship, we come to you O Lord.
We come to you for respite; we come to you for completion; we come to you for forgiveness and
love. **(Response)**

(Silence)

We come, O Lord of Light, seeking the illumination of your Word.
We come for the path we can't find; we come for the life we don't have. We come to you for
our lives are death and you alone have breath and being.

Psalms Reading (NRSV) - Psalm 51:1-7 (*read responsively if worshipping with others*)

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;

according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless in your judgment.

Behold, I was born into iniquity,

and I have been sinful since my mother conceived me.

Behold, you desire truth in the inward being;

therefore, teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;

wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow;

Make me hear with joy and gladness; let the bones which you have broken rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

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

Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

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

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

Deliver me from death, O God, God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud your deliverance.

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise.

For you have no delight in sacrifice;

were I to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased;

the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit

a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Scripture Reading - Matthew 11:28-30 (CEB & Spanish NIV)

“Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I’m gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light.”

»Vengan a mí todos ustedes que están cansados y agobiados, y yo les daré descanso. Carguen con mi yugo y aprendan de mí, pues yo soy apacible y humilde de corazón, y encontrarán descanso para su alma. Porque mi yugo es suave y mi carga es liviana»

Song-Solmo 51 (sung by Jose Rodríguez)

133

Salmo 51

1. Ten pie-dad de mí, oh Dios, con - for-me a tu bon-dad, tu mi -
2. Re - co - noz - co que yo fui re - bel - de sin ra - zón, mis pe -
3. Lá - va - me, Se - ñor y haz-me más pu - ro* que u-na flor, cre-a un

se - ri - cor - dia bo - rre mi mal - dad.
ca - dos pon - go de - lan - te de ti.
nue - vo co - ra - zón den - tro de mí.

*pura

LETRA: Rafael D. Grullón, 1970

MÚSICA: Rafael D. Grullón, 1970; arreg. de Raquel Mora Martínez

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TEN PIEDAD DE MÍ
13 11. 13 8 y coro

Dm Gm/D Dm7 Gm/D Dm C F

Lá - va - me del mal y lím - pia - me de i - ni - qui - dad; con - tra
 Con - tra ti pe - qué y só - lo a ti yo de - frau - dé; a tus
 Can - ta - rá mi len - gua tu jus - ti - cia y tu per - dón; a - la -

Dm/A A7 Dm

Coro D Gm

ti no quie - ro pe - car.
 o - jos cul - pa - ble soy.
 ban - za te o - fre - ce - ré.

Vuél - ve - me, Se - ñor,

C F Gm E9 Asus A

a go - zar - me en ti, a sen - tir la paz de tu per - dón;

Gm E°7 Dm/F Em7(b5)/G Dm/A A7 Dm

me sus - ten - te la no - ble - za de tu a - mor.

Meditation - “Unforced Rhythms of Grace” by Rev. Gregg Sealey

Earth to earth, ashes to ashes and dust to dust. From dust and ashes we came and to dust and ashes we shall return. In a world of battling dual pandemics of COVID-19 and chronic racial inequality in the United States of America and around the world how many of us have felt like we are being ground into the dust of the earth? We have experienced and continue to experience deep grief along with an unquenchable desire for healing, justice and mercy.

This Ash Wednesday I invite us to turn our attention Matthew’s Gospel. In today’s passage we hear phrases like “weary” and “heavy burdened” and we hear them differently this year, don’t we? We might interpret this to be solely a story of comfort; a story about “rest” and a request for a break from all we experience in this world:

- Our weariness with COVID restrictions and isolation from those we love.
- Our weariness at the unvarnished inequality in our world and the menace of racism that needs to be confronted and rooted out of our world.
- The oppressive nature of materialism.
- And our anxiety which is constantly amplified by cable news and social media.

But is that really all this story entails? Is that what this text is about at all?

Let’s dive a little deeper and see what we can learn...

Who exactly are the “weary and the heavy burdened” to whom Jesus is speaking? At the time of composition and the first hearing/reading of this story, Jesus was talking to an agrarian society, to be sure. We might know either from our own firsthand experience or in hearing from others that most farmers work incredibly hard. My Dad grew up on a farm in Nebraska, and he has a saying: “You can take the boy off the farm, but you can’t take the farm out of the boy.” I know how hard my extended family members who are still farmers work year-round. I experienced this work ethic secondhand, because I had it ingrained in my soul through my father who would INSIST that we worked hard at whatever chores or duties were in front of us.

In this particular passage, Jesus turns his attention to the people and addresses them as “the weary and the heavy burdened.” But they were way more than merely tired farmers.

When we take an honest look at their situation, we get a more accurate picture of the circumstances that surrounded their lives:

- Most lived in the “70% tax bracket” meaning they only had 30% of their earnings for all their living expenses. How would most Americans today react to that?!
- Military Power was omnipresent – it was everywhere, and it was a constant force used to coerce the people to comply with the authorities no matter what. For many of us we don’t know what that would be like, but there are some of us who may have grown up in environments that are over-policed and might empathize with this more acutely. Perhaps if those of us who grew up in rural and suburban environments stood in the shoes of our siblings among us who grew up in heavily policed environments, we might hear the phrase ‘military power’ differently?

- These farmers produced mostly for others. The “Elite” were the ones who profited from the labors of the many. Hmmm... Perhaps the more things change the more they stay the same after all?
- These ‘heavily burdened’ and ‘weary ones’ were in constant survival mode. They couldn’t think about a “nest egg.” To stop working would lead to starvation and death, and they were already in and out of malnutrition throughout their lives.

These “burdened ones” were loaded down by all these oppressive forces, and they felt completely powerless. They could not even conceive of a rebellion. They were resigned to their soul-destroying toil. I imagine they felt completely crushed and utterly abandoned.

Feel that for just a moment.

Some of us have probably felt at least elements of that kind of pressure and weight. When we really feel all that pressure, we can begin to understand how they were more than a little intrigued when this dude named Jesus comes along and talks to them about this promise of being given rest. Ultimately, Jesus giving this promise of rest is not just about removing the work and labor involved. It was not about making life easy, but following Jesus helped them to realize that they might actually be made stronger and wiser to meet the challenges of their day. It was not just about surviving the status quo, but it was a revolutionary stance because with Jesus everything changes!

This promise was a promise of being free from injustice and getting out from under their oppressive situation. Perhaps those of us who have lived lives relatively free of harassment might learn from our siblings who have lived under deep subjugation often at the hand of fellow citizens long before the COVID-19 virus arrived on the scene? What might it look like for us to let *them* lead the rest of us to find the way forward in our world today? Might they have something to teach us?

And what did Jesus mean when he invited his followers to “take the yoke?” We might picture a beast of burden (like an ox) pulling a plow with a huge yoke attached to his neck and our first reaction would likely be, “I don’t want that! That looks like more of a burden!”

The first clue to Jesus’ intention is the invitation for us to “*take*” the yoke upon ourselves. Jesus is inviting his followers to undertake a voluntary act and he gives us agency. It is not imposed on us. It is not forced. Jesus is inviting us into discipleship, into followership. We have to picture his invitation being delivered with mercy and love, and a deep desire for us all to be free of the burdens we experience. This doesn’t mean that he will take away all struggles. We still have a cross to bear. But Jesus’ promise means that he will give us the power to do it and may even make the cross feel a little lighter in the process of following him.

The metaphor of a yoke on a plow is likely not exactly the right metaphor because we don’t take it on alone. We are yoked with Christ. In this way it is more like a “three-legged race.” What would it be like to not have all the burdens heaped on our shoulders, but instead to be splinted and bound up with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit? How might we learn to live life empowered by the Spirit? Because it is then and only then can we find rest for our souls, tapping into the promise of Living Water that can quench our thirst. My prayer for us this Lent is that we find these *unforced rhythms of grace*.

There is more to this dust and ashes of our earthly existence than just our chemical composition. The fact that we’re over-glorified clay has a spiritual significance. It reminds

us that we are wholly dependent on God. Without God's vital breath/wind/spirit (which are all the same word in Hebrew = *ru-ah*) we lack transcendence. We are nothing.

Never forget that we are merely ashes and dust, and that we are kin to the dust. When we imagine ourselves to be more than we are we deny our reliance upon a Loving God.

But I pray that the Spirit of Christ will animate this dust this Lent and always, so we can BE all God is calling us to be, and so we can DO all God is calling us to do.

Then we might experience a deep and lasting "rest," even as we become part of the revolution. Amen.

Song of Response

Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days 269

The musical score is written for a four-part setting (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It consists of three systems of music. The lyrics are arranged in five verses, with the first verse starting at the beginning of the first system and the subsequent verses continuing through the second and third systems. The score includes a final double bar line at the end of the third system.

1. Lord, who through - out these for - ty days for
2. As thou with Sa - tan didst con - tend, and
3. As thou didst hun - ger bear, and thirst, so
4. And through these days of pen - i - tence, and
5. A - bid with us, that so, this life of

us didst fast and pray, teach us with thee to
didst the vic - tory win, O give us strength in
teach us, gra - cious Lord, to die to self, and
through thy pas - sion - tide, yea, ev - er - more in
suf - fering o - ver past, an Eas - ter of un -

mourn our sins and close by thee to stay.
thee to fight, in thee to con - quer sin.
chief - ly live by thy most ho - ly word.
life and death, Je - sus, with us a - bid.
end - ing joy we may at - tain at last.

WORDS: Claudia F. Hernaman, 1873 (Mt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:12-13; Lk. 4:1-13)
MUSIC: USA folk melody; arr. by Annabel Morris Buchanan, 1938;
harm. by Charles H. Webb, 1988
Harm. © 1989 The United Methodist Publishing House

LAND OF REST
CM.

A Litany Leading to Prayer (based on Joel 2:1-2, 12-17)

Even now, return to me.

Even now, God says, return to me.

Let the sirens in the streets rage; let the trumpet from the church house blow.

Let those consumed with darkness, gloomy from bad fortunes know that:

Even now, God says, return to me.

Let the abused and abusing hear, the defiant and disobedient revere.

Let the sinner and the scornful draw near.

Even now, God says, return to me.

Return from your ignorance, return from your injustice.

Return from your apathy, return from your agony.

Even now, God says, return to me.

Return from your selfishness, return from your greed.

Return from your neglect, return out of your need.

Even now, God says, return to me.

Return to me, with a clean heart. Return to me with fasting, weeping, and mourning.

Return to me, God says, for I am gracious and merciful;

I am slow to anger and full of steadfast love.

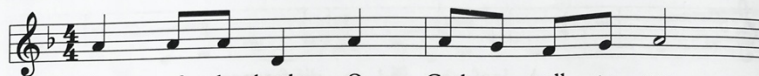
Return to me, God says, for I am your God.

Song of Preparation

GRACE

2136

Out of the Depths



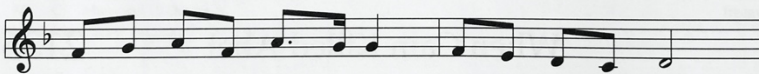
1. Out of the depths, O God, we call to you.
2. Out of the depths of fear, O God, we speak.
3. God of the lov - ing heart, we praise your name.



*Wounds of the past re - main, af - fect - ing all we do.
Break - ing the si - lenc - es, the sear - ing truth we seek.
Dance through our lives and loves; a - noint with Spir - it flame.



Fac - ing our lives, we need your love so much.
Safe a - mong friends, our grief and rage we share.
Your light il - lu - mines each fa - mil - iar face.



Here in this com - mu - ni - ty, heal us by your touch.
Here in this com - mu - ni - ty, hold us in your care.
Here in this com - mu - ni - ty, meet us with your grace.

**Ruth Duck has provided the following words that may be substituted for those who are seriously ill:*

Free us from fear of death, our faith and hope renew ...

or, for those who have been abused:

Wounds of abuse remain, affecting all we do ...

WORDS: Ruth Duck (Ps. 130:1)

MUSIC: Robert J. Batastini

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FENNIVILLE
10.12.10.12

Confession

Out of the depths of our fears, out of the depths of our darkness, we call upon you, O God, to save us. Hear us, now. Christ Jesus, you see our broken lives.

We reach out with greedy hands.

Christ Jesus, you heal our distorted desires.

Grabbing. Gathering. Foraging.

Christ Jesus, you fill our needy souls.

Never filled. Never having enough.

Christ Jesus, you ease our pains and sorrows.

Plundering. Ravaging. Destroying.

Christ Jesus, join us to yourself that we may never be greedy again.

Forgive us, O God.

For we have sinned.

Merciful God,

I confess that I am broken. I have acted in spite, hurt others by my words and deeds, deliberately done what is wrong. Forgive me, O God, for I have sinned.

Merciful God,

I confess that I am broken. I have lived for myself and not for others, judged where I should forgive, belittled where I should have built up. O Lord, I have not done justice or walked humbly with you. Forgive me, O God, for I have sinned.

Christ Jesus, complete us with yourself that we may live from your abundance:

Building. Caring. Creating. Giving. Receiving. Sharing.

God so loved this world and this people that God sent Christ to suffer and die for all. Accept now that gift. Know that you are forgiven, reconciled, accepted, and loved. **Amen.**

Poem: On the Imposition of Ashes During a Pandemic by Rev. Katy Shedlock

The ashes must be self-imposed and I am almost too tired to be sad about it anymore, this year of dusty Wednesdays. Haven't I reminded myself that I will die every time I cover my face with a mask, my nose and lips an imprint in the fragment of shroud we have all been wearing, daily?	an oddity in public, the only people wearing our mortality to the grocery store like an unusual hat. In other years strangers have kindly alerted me to the dirt on my face back when we stood close together without fear. Isn't it enough of a reminder that my soul lives in this stupidly fragile body every time my hands turn raw	from washing every cough or sneeze a potential catastrophe every hug and handshake not given but felt like phantom limbs that we once used to touch each other. Hasn't death imposed itself enough already? On everything? It has even put up its feet on my sleep, and rest is a bygone dream.
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Death lives with us now -
we offered the couch for
two weeks
to slow the spread
and a year later nothing
of ours is left
unscathed.

Lord, I do not want to be
an imposition.
But can't these ashes
mean something
different
this year?

I want to remember
that my body
is good earth
rich in nutrients
alive with microbes
dirt and clay that
breathes,
that will live on
in other ways.

I want to remember
that death
is a return
a landing
like riding in airplanes
the relief
of contact once again
with the ground.

Lord, I want to remember
that our deepest griefs,
buried and still sharp -
inside us, you know -
as if they were written
on our foreheads
for all to see.

I want to remember:
from loss, growth
from pain, change
from death, regeneration,
that to be human
is to have our existence
imposed on us

and the trick of grace
is to be marked
but not burdened.

Press upon me, Lord
these good things.
I repent
in dust and ashes.
Make them
the rich volcanic soil
from which comes
a harvest of joy.

Act of Penitence

And now, sisters and brothers, we invite you to grab whichever symbol you have chosen to use (ashes and oil, just oil, or soil and water) and prepare for a ritual act of penitence.

In Genesis it says that God took the dust of the earth, and made humankind. The word "Adam" means "mud body" or "mud person". And so, we remember that we are made from the elements of the earth. If you are using soil and water, we invite you to mix just a little bit of water with the soil to create mud. Take a moment to feel the texture of the mud we are made from, or rub the ashes and oil between your fingers.

When you are ready, you are invited to mark the back of your hand or your forehead with the sign of the cross or, if you are worshipping with others, take turns marking each other as you say: *"From dust you have come, to dust you shall return."*

As you complete your act of penitence, remember that you are not alone, that we are as close as breath to God.

A Statement of Faith *(from the United Church of Canada)*

**We are not alone,
we live in God's world.
We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,**

the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.
We trust in God.
We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God.

Sending Forth

May God, who has forgiven and fed us,
now make us strong for these days ahead.
May Jesus lead us, and we be found faithful to follow.
May the Spirit drive us into the wilderness,
burning away the chaff of our lives,
and purifying our hearts for all to see and be blessed.
And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Mercy, Master, and Fire,
be with us and remain with us always!
And All of God's People Say: Amen!