**ash wednesday- february 14, 2024**

**zion, philipsburg**

**GATHERING**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**Thank you for being part of this Ash Wednesday worship service as we come together to mark the beginning of the Christian season of Lent. We will spend the coming days journeying with Jesus toward the cross; toward the death that ultimately brings resurrection life.**

**Tonight we acknowledge our sin and our mortality. We come to glimpse the Christ who offers forgiveness, who offers everlasting life, and to share in the sacrament of his body and blood.**

**As part of tonight’s worship, the imposition of ashes will be offered. Ashes have been used in Christian churches to mark the beginning of Lent since the 10th Century, and ashes are mentioned in scripture as a symbol of purification and repentance. We offer the imposition of ashes tonight as a physical reminder of our mortality and sin and as an assurance of God’s forgiveness and salvation.**

**Let us begin our time of worship by focusing our minds and hearts on God’s presence with us. I invite you to relax into a comfortable position and close your eyes as you take a few deep breaths. Let us pray.**

**PRAYER OF RELEASING**

Holy, holy, holy God,  
We are grateful for your presence. We rest in the promise of your grace.  
Our minds and our spirits are restless. Our attention is tugged away from you.  
Let us unclench our hands and release these things:  
We release all that we have done recently–whether for good or for ill.  
We release all that we feel like we should have done today, but did not do.  
We release all that we need to do soon. We release our fear.  
We release our anxiety. We release our impatience. We release our pride—and our shame. Everything that pulls us away from you, O God, we release.

**GREETING (ELW p. 251)**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**WORD**

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

**FIRST READING:****Joel 2:1-2, 12-17**

A reading from Joel.

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 word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM: Psalm 51:1-17**

1Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;  
  in your great compassion blot out my offenses.  
 2**Wash me through and through from my wickedness,** **and cleanse me | from my sin.**  
 3For I know my offenses, and my sin is ever before me.  
 4**Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight;**  
  **so you are justified when you speak and right in your judgment.**  
 5Indeed, I was born steeped in wickedness, a sinner from my mother’s womb.  
 6**Indeed, you delight in truth deep within me,** **and would have me know wisdom deep within.**  
 7Remove my sins with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be purer than snow.  
 8**Let me hear joy and gladness;** **that the body you have broken | may rejoice.**  
 9Hide your face **|** from my sins, and blot out all my wickedness.  
 10**Create in me a clean heart, O God,** **and renew a right spirit within me.**  
 11Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.  
 12**Restore to me the joy of your salvation** **and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.**  
 13Let me teach your ways to offenders, and sinners shall be restored to you.  
 14**Rescue me from bloodshed, O God of my salvation,**  
  **and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness.**  
 15O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.  
 16**For you take no delight in sacrifice, or  I would give it.** **You are not pleased with burnt offering.**  
 17The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; a troubled and broken heart, O God, you will not despise.

**SECOND READING: 2 Corinthians 5:20b--6:10**

A reading from 2 Corinthians.

20bWe 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.  
 6:1As 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.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (ELW p. 142)- Return to the Lord Your God**

**GOSPEL: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

[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.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

*The assembly is seated.*

**SERMON (ELW p. 252)**

 Maryetta Anschutz, the founding Head of the Episcopal School in Los Angeles, California, remembers travelling to England as a child and touring the many beautiful cathedrals.[[1]](#_ftn1) She was always fascinated by the alms or donation boxes built into the walls of these great churches. If a coin was dropped into the box, it made a great ringing sound that filled the cathedral with a wonderful "noise." Folks would often turn around and look to see what the noise was. One day, Maryetta watched an older woman enter the cathedral; she stopped to pray and then dropped a folded paper bill into the box. Maryetta listened, but there was no sound, and not a soul turned around to wonder what was going on. Her gift, in reality, had a greater value than the coin, but no one knew and heard, except for God.

We celebrate the beginning of Lent this evening. It is a sombre 40-day (minus the Sundays) season where religious folks fast, pray and give alms. Our gospel reading from Matthew today speaks about these opportunities and is also part of Jesus' sermon on the Mount. In his great sermon, Jesus spoke of the uniqueness and blessedness of God's beloved children; he declared God's mission and taught the disciples and his followers about the essence of true faith and how to live lives of faith in response to hearing the good news.

We heard Jesus call for all to give alms, pray and fast in secret, to not be like the hypocrites (meaning some of the Pharisees) who announced their prayers, donations and fasting rituals in the synagogues and on the street corners. Were they more worried about what people thought and their piety in needing to be seen, heard, and praised? This type of faith sounds like more of a competition of boasting and ego. It was pride-driven rather than God-given and went against the most theological foundations of faith….to love and give glory to God and to love one another.

And again, as I was reading the passage, I said to myself out loud that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Because it still rings true in our modern times. We may use the 40 days of Lent to give a little more here and there; we might pray for someone who is sick, and we might give up something, but it can't be something we couldn't live without. We buy too much to keep up with the Joneses; we speak to impress for our own gain and not for the benefit of bettering our neighbour. We continually try to live up to others' expectations in order to be successful in life, more often to the detriment of our mental health and happiness. It sounds harsh, doesn't it?

Know that Jesus' words call us to live differently. He calls for us to lessen the need for self-promotion and live into the faith and love that only God can provide. When we are strong in our faith, when we trust in God and believe in the hope and promise of the eternal life after our earthly life, we lose that burden of trying so hard to impress those around us. We lose the ego and egocentricities and begin caring for, praying for and loving one another, just as we are so deeply loved. We don't feel the need to shout it from the rooftops because God does not need to be impressed. We know who is listening; we are at our love.

And it is then that we figure out that the Christian life is not about "me and I" but "we and us." There are lots of folks in our world who believe that a catastrophic event is going to occur; they stockpile food, weapons, supplies and money, preparing for the worst. There is a strong need to take care of themselves because, in their minds, no one will do it for them. It is a dog-eat-dog world where every person must fend for themselves. No one can be trusted, certainly not the government, not law enforcement, not their neighbour and definitely not the stranger who begs for money on the street corner.

This is so contrary to the actions and words of Jesus Christ and what it means to be a disciple of the Christian faith. Jesus calls us to prepare for the best, to find and share the good news, to live and share generously, to feed the hungry and the poor, to talk to the stranger, to care for one another, to pray with and for one another. God hears our cries of sorrow or joy. God hears our prayers, whether they are silent or spoken aloud. God is listening.

Tonight, we will share in the sacrament of communion; we will confess our sins and receive the gift of ashes on our foreheads. We will hear the words, "Remember you are dust, and to dust, you shall return." These actions are holy and life-giving. They offer the steadfast hope that God is always with us, feeding us, forgiving us and inviting us into the promise of eternal life and that there is nothing we need to do. There is no repayment, and there is no deservedness. It is grace, and it is love.

Receiving the ashes reminds us of our mortality, that our earthly lives will end. But know that the ashes represent more than our own earthly death. They can represent the death of old systems of power and control, the systems of self-promotion and competition. The ashes offer us a new way of living in the love of God through sharing our gifts, offering humble prayer, and living with the things we actually need instead of what we think we need or want.

This is the journey of Lent. This is the journey of discipleship and the journey of faith, grace, and love. This is the relationship that God calls us to be in, both with God and one another.

Wishing you a blessed Lenten season. Thanks be to God. Amen.

[[1]](#_ftnref1) Maryetta Anschutz, Pastoral Perspective of Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21, in Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 2, kindle edition.

**HYMN OF THE DAY*Chief of Sinners Though I Be* (ELW 609)**

1 Chief of sinners though I be,  
Jesus shed his blood for me,  
died that I might live on high,  
lives that I might never die.  
As the branch is to the vine,  
I am his, and he is mine.  
  
2 Oh, the height of Jesus' love!  
Higher than the heav'ns above,  
deeper than the depths of sea,  
lasting as eternity.  
Love that found me--wondrous thought--  
found me when I sought him not.  
  
3 Only Jesus can impart  
balm to heal the wounded heart,  
peace that flows from sin forgiv'n,  
joy that lifts the soul to heav'n,  
faith and hope to walk with God  
in the way that Enoch trod.  
  
4 Chief of sinners though I be,  
Christ is all in all to me;  
all my wants to him are known,  
all my sorrows are his own.  
He sustains the hidden life  
safe with him from earthly strife.  
5 O my Savior, help afford  
by your Spirit and your word!  
When my wayward heart would stray,  
keep me in the narrow way;  
grace in time of need supply  
while I live and when I die.

**INVITATION TO LENT (ELW p. 252)**

*The assembly is seated.*

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.

**CONFESSION OF SIN (ELW p. 252)**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

*Silence is kept for reflection and self-examination.*

Most holy and merciful God,

**we confess to you and to one another,** **and before the whole company of heaven,**

**that we have sinned by our fault,** **by our own fault,** **by our own most grievous fault,** **in thought, word, and deed,** **by what we have done and by what we have left undone.**

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven. **Have mercy on us, O God.**

We have shut our ears to your call to serve as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit. **Have mercy on us, O God.**

Our past unfaithfulness, the pride, envy, hypocrisy, need for competition, and apathy that have infected our lives, we confess to you. **Have mercy on us, O God.**

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people, we confess to you. **Have mercy on us, O God.**

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to share the faith that is in us, we confess to you. **Have mercy on us, O God.**

Our neglect of human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty, we confess to you. **Have mercy on us, O God.**

Our false judgments, our uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us, we confess to you. **Have mercy on us, O God.**

Our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us, we confess to you. **Have mercy on us, O God.**

Restore us, O God, and let your anger depart from us.

**Hear us, O God, for your mercy is great.**

**IMPOSITION OF ASHES (ELW p. 254)**

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth.

May these ashes be a sign of our mortality and penitence, reminding us

that only by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ are we given eternal life;

through the same Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

*Ministers mark the forehead of each person with a cross of ashes, saying:*

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

Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation,

**that we may show forth your glory in the world.**

By the cross and passion of your Son, our Savior,

**bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.**

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. **Amen.**

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Sustained by God’s abundant mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of creation. *A brief silence.*

O Lord, our God, you gather your church and call us to return to you. Accompany us throughout our Lenten pilgrimage. Create in us clean hearts and renew all the baptized to declare your praise. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Renew your creation, O God. Bring rains to parched places and heal lands affected by a changing climate that all inhabitants of the earth experience your abundance. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Renew the nations, O God. Give voice to those on the margins and resolve to world leaders who seek to protect those most vulnerable. Loosen the bonds of injustice and bring an end to all violence, oppression, and persecution. Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

Renew your people, O God. Respond to those who cry out to you in secret or in seclusion. Equip us with compassion to care for those who experience homelessness, food insecurity, economic hardship, and illness *especially* Sarah, Chris, John, Vivian, Stuart, Edna, Susan, Marg, Marlene, Felix, Debbie G, Nancy Ann, Jean, Hilde, our members in long term care Esther, Robert, Rob, and Evelyn, and those we name out loud or in the silence of our hearts ( good pause). Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Renew this congregation, O God. Inspire our faith formation ministries and those who teach and lead. Invigorate us with lifelong curiosity and wonder as we grow as your disciples. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O Lord, our God, we give thanks for all your faithful ones of every time and place. Renew us by the example of their lives of prayer and service, and at the last, bring us with them into your everlasting presence. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your steadfast love and your promise to renew your whole creation; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

**MEAL**

God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

**GREAT THANKSGIVING -DIALOGUE**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

**PREFACE**

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places

give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. You call your people to cleanse their hearts and prepare with joy for the paschal feast, that, renewed in the gift of baptism, we may come to the fullness of your grace. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY**

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,** **God of pow’r and might,** **heaven and earth are full of your glory.** **Hosanna. Hosanna. Hosanna in the highest.** **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.** **Hosanna in the highest.**

**THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE IV**

Blessed are you, O God of the universe. Your mercy is everlasting and your faithfulness endures from age to age.

Praise to you for creating the heavens and the earth. Praise to you for saving the earth from the waters of the flood. Praise to you for bringing the Israelites safely through the sea. Praise to you for leading your people through the wilderness

to the land of milk and honey. Praise to you for the words and deeds of Jesus, your anointed one. Praise to you for the death and resurrection of Christ.

Praise to you for your Spirit poured out on all nations.

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.

With this bread and cup we remember our Lord’s passover from death to life

as we proclaim the mystery of faith: **Christ has died.** **Christ is risen.**

**Christ will come again.**

O God of resurrection and new life: Pour out your Holy Spirit on us

and on these gifts of bread and wine. Bless this feast. Grace our table with your presence. **Come, Holy Spirit.**

Reveal yourself to us in the breaking of the bread. Raise us up as the body of Christ for the world. Breathe new life into us. Send us forth,

burning with justice, peace, and love. **Come, Holy Spirit.**

With your holy ones of all times and places, with the earth and all its creatures,

with sun and moon and stars, we praise you, O God, blessed and holy Trinity,

now and forever. **Amen**

**LORD’S PRAYER (ELW p. 112)**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,** **hallowed be thy name,** **thy kingdom come,**

**thy will be done,** **on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;**

**and forgive us our trespasses,** **as we forgive those**

**who trespass against us;**

**and lead us not into temptation,** **but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,** **and the power, and the glory,**

**forever and ever. Amen.**

**INVITATION TO COMMUNION (ELW p. 112)**

Come to the banquet, for all is now ready.

**COMMUNION SONG- Lamb of GOd**

**COMMUNION (ELW p. 112)**

The body of Christ, given for you.

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

**COMMUNION HYMN-** ***Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling (ELW 608)***

**PRAYER (ELW p. 254)**

Let us pray.

Merciful God, accompany our journey through these forty days. Renew us in the gift of baptism, that we may provide for those who are poor, pray for those in need, fast from self-indulgence, and above all that we may find our treasure in the life 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.**

**SENDING**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**BLESSING-** *T.S. Eliot, “East Coker”*

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you, which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre, the lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed.  
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on darkness,  
I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope.  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love, for love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith. But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting. Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:  
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

**SENDING HYMN-** ***The Glory Of These Forty Days (ELW 320)***

**DISMISSAL (ELW p. 255)**

Go forth into the world to serve God with gladness; be of good courage;

hold fast to that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people;

love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. **Thanks be to God.**

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