

## February 17, 2020 – At-Home Printed Worship

A blessed Ash Wednesday to you, and welcome to the season of Lent. On a typical, pre-COVID Ash Wednesday, we would gather at church and our worship service would include the imposition of ashes on foreheads and communion. Each year, I have used ashes made from the previous year's Lenten palms being burnt, then mixed into a paste with olive oil. This ash paste is marked on your foreheads, with the reminder: "Remember that we all are dust, and to dust we all shall return."

This Lent, and this Ash Wednesday, drawing so close as to touch your forehead to impose ashes would violate the teaching we get from Jesus on Maundy Thursday: to love each other. This year, the best way for us to continue to love each other is to maintain our social distancing, keep safe, and to worship from our homes. However, regardless of the mortal realities which themselves remind us daily that we all are dust, and to dust we shall return, we are also members of Christ's body, marked by divine Spirit in a unity which no pandemic can undermine. Our unity in Jesus, marked by the cross at baptism, and our call to follow Jesus forms the central theme of our Lenten learning in 2021.

### For this Ash Wednesday, you have two services available:

- A Zoom service from St Peter's at 5.30 pm, which will include anointing with oil (any cooking grade oil you have at home will work), and communion. This service is also available in print and by email with youtube links. To join this Zoom service, click <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86236235915?pwd=QTVWaGc1UGZPdldWTFVld3lOQTVPUT09>  
Meeting ID: 862 3623 5915 & Passcode: 461473  
**You don't have to have a computer or internet to connect to any of the Zoom services; you can also just call in on one of these numbers (long distance charges may apply):**  
1 587 328 1099 or  
1 647 374 4685 or  
1 647 558 0588 or  
1 778 907 2071 or  
1 204 272 7920 or  
1 438 809 7799
- **A livestream Synod-Wide service will be made available on Facebook, with Bishop Michael Pryse preaching, beginning at 6.30 pm.** That service is accessible through this link (<https://www.facebook.com/ESynodELCIC>). All are welcome. There will be imposition of Ashes, so if you have ash paste (burn your Palm Sunday cross from last year and mix with a drop or two of olive oil), you can impose ashes during the service. There will NOT be communion at the Synod service.

This Ash Wednesday, for our Zoom service, your invitation is to remind yourself of your baptismal anointing, by marking your own forehead with a cross, not of ash paste, but of oil. Any kind of cooking grade oil will do – I usually use olive oil at baptisms. You should also have communion elements ready if you want to have communion.

Our learning context for Lent, which is woven through the Lenten Sundays, is examining our own lives and the current realities of our community, and asking ourselves the question:

### **"Joined at our baptism in Spirit, as members of the body of Christ Jesus, how are we called to witness?"**

Our in-house Lenten study material will be delivered each Sunday of Lent, in the form of four fictional stories I have authored (based on real life circumstances). You will have a week with each story before it is unpacked along with scripture the following Sunday, when a new fictional story will be provided. You will receive the stories in print form along with Sunday worship material. Your print content will come to you in the week following the Sunday when the service is "aired" on Zoom (in keeping with the week-after-the-Sunday delivery, which we began in 2021). So, your first "story" will arrive in the post the week of February 21<sup>st</sup> ☺

Your Lenten learning job, should you choose to undertake it, is to read the story and spend some time with the questions and scripture(s) provided each Sunday, before they are unpacked the following Sunday in the sermon. So, for the season of Lent, this is our in-house study plan:

Week of: Sunday February 21<sup>st</sup> – preface teaching on the use of stories for our spiritual teaching, deliver the first story “Two Guys in the Attic” and scriptures with home-study questions, which will be studied together on February 28<sup>th</sup>.

Week of: February 28<sup>th</sup> – sermon on “Two Guys in the Attic” and scriptures, deliver the second story “Susie’s Home on the Grand” and scriptures with home-study questions, which will be studied together on March 7<sup>th</sup>.

Week of: March 7<sup>th</sup> – sermon on “Susie’s Home on the Grand” and scriptures, deliver the third story “George in the Garage” and scriptures with home-study questions, which will be studied together on March 14<sup>th</sup>.

Week of: March 14<sup>th</sup> – sermon on “George in the Garage” and scriptures, deliver the fourth story “Sheldon seeks Sanctuary” and scriptures with home-study questions, which will be studied together on March 28<sup>th</sup> (March 21<sup>st</sup> is AGM, so we will have a shorter service on that Sunday, leaving our last story review for Palm Sunday, March 28<sup>th</sup>).

Week of: March 21<sup>st</sup> – short service as Zoom-involved AGM which may take more time than in-person only AGM.

Week of: March 28<sup>th</sup> – Palm Sunday – sermon on “Sheldon seeks Sanctuary” and scriptures.

So, with no further ado ☺ Welcome to Lent and your Ash Wednesday service. With love, Pastor Janaki.

**Our Ash Wednesday Service begins with a time of silence. Please take this time to centre yourself, still your mind, and bring your focus to:**

- **The wonder of God’s love for you**
- **The unity we have with God in Jesus, through our baptism – not with water but through Spirit.**
- **Knowing that God has set God’s seal upon your heart, and summons you to live into that witness.**

#### **Greeting:**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, in your home and in mine.

#### **Prayer of the Day:**

Holy One, on this Ash Wednesday, we commit to taking time this Lent to examine our own hearts, to reflect on conditions in our community, to think about our invitation to witness to your love in, with and through your precious son: Jesus.

Help us in this journey of study and reflection, to be honest, humble, and open to Spirit’s breaking in and anointing our witness with the inimitable imprint of Jesus’ love, so that through our faithful witness, others may come to know Christ love. Amen.

#### **The Lesson: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13**

Companions as we are in this work with you, we beg you, please don’t squander one bit of this marvelous life God has given us. God reminds us,

I heard your call in the nick of time;

The day you needed me, I was there to help.

Well, now is the right time to listen, the day to be helped. Don’t put it off; don’t frustrate God’s work by showing up late, throwing a question mark over everything we’re doing. Our work as God’s servants gets validated—or not—in the details. People are watching us as we stay at our post, alertly, unswervingly . . . in hard times, tough times, bad times; when we’re beaten up, jailed, and mobbed; working hard, working late, working without eating; with pure heart, clear head, steady hand; in gentleness, holiness, and honest love; when we’re telling the truth, and when God’s showing his power; when we’re doing our best setting things right; when we’re praised, and when we’re blamed; slandered, and honored; true to our word, though distrusted; ignored by the world, but recognized by God; terrifically alive, though rumored to be dead; beaten within an inch of our lives, but refusing to die; immersed in tears, yet always filled with deep joy; living on handouts, yet enriching many; having nothing, having it all.

Dear, dear Corinthians, I can’t tell you how much I long for you to enter this wide-open, spacious life. We didn’t fence you in. The smallness you feel comes from within you. Your lives aren’t small, but you’re living them in a small way.

I'm speaking as plainly as I can and with great affection. Open up your lives. Live openly and expansively! [The Message Translation]

Word of God, word of life. **C: Thanks be to God.**

**Gospel Acclamation: Take, O, Take Me As I Am ELW 814**

**Click here:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mf3QHqQ-004>

Text & Tune: John L. Bell © 1995 WGRG, c/o Iona Community, Glasgow, Scotland WGRG, c/o Iona Community, Glasgow, Scotland Administrators; Wild Goose Resource Group Used by Permission, CCLI License # 11098609

**The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

**C: Glory to you O Lord.**

"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. 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. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"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. But 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.

"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. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so 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.

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

The Gospel of our Lord. **C: Praise to you, O Christ.\***

**Message (Imagine Pastor Janaki's voice here ☺)**

**What will you take in your last shirt but your heart? Dare to forgive and God will be with you.**

Some of you may have heard me mention on previous occasions, a conversation I had with one of our beloved saints, Mike Untch, in his final weeks in the hospital. We talked about the last shirt, and I remember Mike saying to me, the last shirt has no pockets. Meaning, we don't get to take any of the "stuff" with us.

I have thought of this statement more times than I can count. And it comes back to me every Ash Wednesday when this scripture rolls around from the Gospel of Matthew ... a selection in which we are reminded to refrain from show-boating our faith, but rather invited into a deeply intimate and private, untrumpeted living out of our faith in all the spiritual actions that we take. But it is the last paragraph of this lesson that most nails the last shirt message home for me. The instruction Jesus gives:

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

I hear so much wisdom in this scripture. And it has become so much more relevant during this time of pandemic, when we have become more acutely aware of the transient nature of life itself. I remember last fall, as schools prepared to re-open, reading that many school teachers and ECE's had prepared their wills, as they got ready to enter what we have come to call "frontlines" for their work, being exposed to people who were not in their bubble.

Mortal life gives us no guarantees: remember that we all are dust, and to dust we shall return.

These are the words with which we usually come to Ash Wednesday, and the gritty, ashy, oily paste is rubbed into our foreheads in the shape of a cross to remind us of this ... we all are dust, and to dust we shall return.

So, here's the thing:

- We all are dust, and to dust we shall return. Given.
- The last shirt has no pockets – we can't take the things that moths can eat and rust (or the stock market) can consume with us.

Yet ... yet, the gospel of Matthew does NOT tell us to refrain from praying, fasting, sharing with the poor (or giving alms), or anointing ourselves as a mark of our relationship with God ... what it warns us against is the doing of any of these things to impress others ... it warns us about the risk of hypocrisy when we do these things for show, but are not actually deeply committed to these things in our innermost hearts, and in our most private and intimate relationship with God.

And, every Ash Wednesday when we study this ready, we jump from verses 1-6, to verses 16-21. How many of you, following Ash Wednesday service, read through the bit in the middle? The middle bit, verse 7-15 also contain not only another admonition: against praying in an empty way, but the middle bit cites what we commonly know as "The Lord's Prayer", and concludes (vs 14-15) with this sentiment:

"In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do.  
You can't get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others.  
If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God's part."  
[The Message Translation]

I love this translation because I think it accurately expresses how this forgiveness thing works:

- God's forgiveness is made freely available to all of us through Jesus' death on the cross.
- Whether or not we choose to cut ourselves off from God's part depends on whether or not we are willing to be open-handed, open-hearted with mercy whose action-word is forgiveness.
- If we want to hold on tightly to the things done onto us that have hurt us, our fists and hearts are closed and by our own tight holding on – and in this closed stance, the abundance of God's love cannot reach us – we are cut off from God's part by our own unwillingness to forgive – a fate more poisonous to our mortal lives than even making treasures of things rust or moths can eat!

God is with us, all the time. But we are not able to bathe in the liberating bath of God's love and mercy if we hold ourselves aloft from the living water. We remain shackled to the mortal dust when we do not forgive. To ask for God's forgiveness and not forgive others, is to run the bath water, but never get in.

This is why I think it is almost more appropriate to celebrate Ash Wednesday apart rather than together. To sit with this Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6, by ourselves and digest it deeply, understanding that our access to the privileges of unearned unity with God through Jesus depends on our exercising that very unity with God, in extending our own mercy into the world with such abundance that it defies all the dust to which our mortal bodily realities will return ... like Jesus himself on that walk to the cross.

The words of this Taizé hymn, which I hope we will use throughout Lent 2021, echo all I have spoken of here:

"God is forgiveness.  
Dare to forgive and God will be with you.  
God is forgiveness, Love and do not fear."<sup>1</sup>

As we study and bring ourselves before God this Lent, please go back to this message regularly. When you encounter your own desire to say others should do this or that or the other thing ... When I share stories with you based on the

---

<sup>1</sup> God is Forgiveness Text & Tune: Taizé Community Tune: © 2007, Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., agent Text: © 2007, Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., agent All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with Permission under ONE License # A 727610

real experiences of real people, and your knee jerk reaction is to criticize and judge others ... anticipate that wrong things may be done, and not one of us is here because we are right all the time. We all need God's forgiveness. In order to receive it, we all need to dare to forgive – so that we keep our own selves connected with God.

Love and do not fear. Amen.

**Hymn of the Day: God is Forgiveness**

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gR1g0UAY2II>

Text & Tune: Taizé Community; Tune: © 2007, Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., agent

Text: © 2007, Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., agent; All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with Permission under ONE License # A 727610

## **INVITATION TO LENT - Returning to God's Love**

*You are encouraged to make the sign of the cross, to remember that God has claimed you in love, through Jesus.*

During this season of Lent, we set aside time to admit sin. For some, sin is hurting someone else. For others, sin is creating a rift between people. Sin may be our self-induced separation from God. We confess or admit to the things that make us feel guilty, ashamed or sad. To confess to God is to receive ... to receive God's grace, forgiveness and pardon. Let us offer to God what lies heavily in our hearts this day.

Blessed be Creator: Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
Who holds the doors of love and unity open for us,  
Welcoming us back from dark places,  
Even when we have closed the door on relationship. **Amen**

*Brief silence is kept for SILENT PRAYER & reflection*

Then, we pray ... Holy One:

**We know we have fallen short.**

**We turn our backs instead of facing each other.**

**We remain silent when we could speak.**

**We speak when we could listen.**

**We close the door when we could fling it wide open.**

**We judge when we could seek understanding.**

**We cling when we could give.**

**We use when we could refrain.**

**Forgive us, Holy One, for being so very human at times.**

**help us to continue to grow into your way:**

**The Way of Jesus. Amen.**

We hear the assurance of God's forgiveness:

Jesus Christ on the altar holds God's doorway open.

Jesus on the cross ensures we have a way home:

Through his broken body, through his blood that was shed,

We are welcomed back into our home with God

Who receives us with love, forgiving and renewing us every time we knock.

When we dare to forgive, we open ourselves to God's generosity.

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Adapted from: <https://holdfasttowhatisgood.com/liturgy/prayer-of-confession>

## **Anointing ourselves with Oil – have some oil ready to use as a reminder of baptismal unity with God.**

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

We are mortal but through you we are eternal and divine.

With this anointing oil, please remind us

Through your generosity are we given eternal life;

through the Jesus our Redeemer and Way-maker. **Amen.**

*Mark the sign of the cross in oil, on your forehead.*

God help us to remember:

"God is forgiveness.

Dare to forgive and God will be with you.

God is forgiveness, Love and do not fear."<sup>2</sup> **Amen.**

<sup>2</sup> God is Forgiveness Text & Tune: Taizé Community Tune: © 2007, Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., agent Text: © 2007, Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., agent All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with Permission under ONE License # A 727610

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Awaiting the promised light of God that comes in Jesus, we pray for the body of Christ, the world, God's creation and those who suffer ...

God of abundant blessings, God whose love denies confinement, make us true disciples, removing empty piety from our midst. Make us, your body, an example of Jesus' unbounded love. We bring forward our prayers for your church, calling them out to you, here:

(include your petitions for the church – the body of all believers in Christ here)

**God of abundance ... Hear our prayers.**

Jesus our redeemer and way-maker, You came for everyone, bringing forgiveness and grace to everyone.

Not one person or nation or place did you leave out. We pray for our world, our country, our region: so badly in need of all you bear. We call out our prayers for places that need your healing here:

(include your petitions for the places that need God's healing here)

**God of abundance ... Hear our prayers.**

Spirit of God, mighty counsellor of all creation, you are here. Where creation groans in pain, where all hope seems lost, you are here. In carbon footprints, big and small, in waterways and forests, in garbage dumps and trash heaps, you are there. Our responsibility for creation and the environment weighs heavily on us.

We call out our prayers for creation and the environment here:

(include your petitions for the creation and the environment here)

**God of abundance ... Hear our prayers.**

God who comes as Father, Son and Holy spirit, we pray: for families affected by addictions and suicide, of which indigenous families are affected in disproportionately high numbers.

We pray for those who are suffering in mind, body or spirit: we pray for those we name out loud, and in the silence of our hearts:

(name the people on your heart here)

May we all lean on you for comfort,

**God of abundance ... Hear our prayers.**

These, our prayers, spoken out loud or within our souls, we bring before you .... entrusting all into your tender-loving care. In Jesus' powerful name. AMEN.

### **Share the peace of Christ:**

The Peace of Christ be with you always, in your home and in mine, and throughout God's creation.

### **Meal:**

**Click here for the communion liturgy from worship on YouTube:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsiaRdyFr50>

### **Prayer after Communion**

Compassionate God:

you feed us with your bread of love,

you quench our thirst with your wine of forgiveness.

Sustain us during this time of Lent:

give us your hunger for justice,

make us generous with a love like yours.

Make us one with Jesus.

**Amen**

### **Blessing:**

May God bless you and keep you.

May the face of God shine upon you with grace and mercy.

May God look upon you with favor

and give you ☩ peace. Amen.

**Dismissal:**

Marked with the cross of Christ,  
go forth to love and serve the Lord,  
forgiving with a generosity like God's own forgiveness of you.

*C: Thanks be to God. \**

*Leave in Silence*

\*From Sundays and Seasons.com. Copyright 2021 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission under Augsburg Fortress Liturgies Annual License #42368. New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.