

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

Ash Wednesday

On Ash Wednesday we begin our forty-day journey toward Easter with a day of fasting and repentance. Marking our foreheads with dust, we acknowledge that we die and return to the earth. At the same time, the dust traces the life-giving cross indelibly marked on our foreheads at baptism. While we journey through Lent to return to God, we have already been reconciled to God through Christ. We humbly pray for God to make our hearts clean while we rejoice that “now is the day of salvation.” Returning to our baptismal call, we more intentionally bear the fruits of mercy and justice in the world.

WELCOME! We are glad to have you join us in worship today. Here are a few notes to help you feel more at home participating in our worship.

Worshiping. Today’s service is printed in this bulletin. Parts in **bold** indicate responses by everyone in which you are invited to participate.

Communion: *Lutheran Christians believe that the Lord Jesus Christ feeds us with his true body and blood “in, with, and under” the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper. All baptized Christians who receive Communion in their own churches are welcome to receive the sacrament. Please note that the darker wine is non-alcoholic and is available from the Lector. Communion will be distributed continuously, in procession. Please come forward as directed by the ushers.*

ST. STEPHEN’S LUTHERAN CHURCH

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GREETING

P The Lord be with you. **C And also with you.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P Let us pray. Almighty and ever-living God, you hate nothing you have made, and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and honest hearts, so that, truly repenting of our sins, we may receive from you, the God of all mercy, full pardon and forgiveness through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **C Amen.**

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

A reading from Joel.

Blow 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— a 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.

Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment. Who 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?

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

Between 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. **C Thanks be to God.**

PSALM: Psalm 51:1-17 (*Psalm will be read responsively*)

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your | steadfast love; in your great compassion blot out | my offenses.

Wash me through and through | from my wickedness, and cleanse me | from my sin.

For I know | my offenses, and my sin is ev- | er before me.

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. R

Indeed, I was born | steeped in wickedness, a sinner from my | mother's womb.

Indeed, you delight in truth | deep within me, and would have me know wisdom | deep within.

Remove my sins with hyssop, and I | shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be pur- | er than snow.

Let me hear | joy and gladness; that the body you have broken | may rejoice. R

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

Create in me a clean | heart, O God, and renew a right spir- | it within me.

Cast me not away | from your presence, and take not your Holy Spir- | it from me.

Restore to me the joy of | your salvation and sustain me with your boun- | tiful Spirit. R

Let me teach your ways | to offenders, and sinners shall be re- | stored to you.

Rescue me from bloodshed, O God of | my salvation, and my tongue shall sing | of your righteousness.

O Lord, o- | pen my lips, and my mouth shall pro- | claim your praise.

For you take no delight in sacrifice, or | I would give it. You are not pleased | with burnt offering.

The sacrifice of God is a | troubled spirit; a troubled and broken heart, O God, you will | not despise. **R**

SECOND READING: 2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10

A reading from 2 Corinthians.

We entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As we work together with him, we entreat you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way:

in great endurance, afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; in purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors and yet are true, as unknown and yet are well known, as dying and look—we are alive, as punished and yet not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing everything. The word of the Lord. **C Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Let Your Steadfast Love

Let your steadfast love come to us, O Lord.

Save us as you promised; we will trust your word.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major, 4/4 time. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of text, and the second staff contains the melody for the second line. The lyrics are printed below the notes.

Music: Robert Buckley Farlee
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GOSPEL: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

A The Lord be with you. **C And also with you.**

A The holy gospel according to Matthew. **C Glory to you, O Lord.**

Beware of practicing your righteousness 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 somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces 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. The gospel of the Lord.

C Praise to you, O Christ.

HYMN OF THE DAY: *Will You Come and Follow Me: The Summons* (ELW 798)



1 "Will you come and fol - low me if I but call
 2 "Will you leave your - self be - hind if I but call
 3 "Will you let the blind - ed see if I but call
 4 "Will you love the you you hide if I but call
 5 Lord, your sum - mons ech - oes true when you but call



your name? Will you go where you don't
 your name? Will you care for cruel and
 your name? Will you set the pris - 'ners
 your name? Will you quell the fear in -
 my name. Let me turn and fol - low



know and nev - er be the same?
 kind and nev - er be the same?
 free and nev - er be the same?
 side and nev - er be the same?
 you and nev - er be the same.



Will you let my love be shown, will you let my
 Will you risk the hos - tile stare, should your life at -
 Will you kiss the lep - er clean, and do such as
 Will you use the faith you've found to re - shape the
 In your com - pa - ny I'll go where your love and



name be known, will you let my life be
 tract or scare? Will you let me an - swer
 this un - seen, and ad - mit to what I
 world a - round, through my sight and touch and
 foot - steps show. Thus I'll move and live and



grown in you and you in me?"
 pray'r in you and you in me?"
 mean in you and you in me?"
 sound in you and you in me?"
 grow in you and you in me.

INVITATION TO LENT

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

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

Most holy and merciful God, **C 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. **C 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. **C Have mercy on us, O God.** Our past unfaithfulness, the pride, envy, hypocrisy, and apathy that have infected our lives, we confess to you. **C Have mercy on us, O God.**

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

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

Restore us, O God, and let your anger depart from us.
C Hear us, O God, for your mercy is great.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

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. **C Amen.**

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.

SONG DURING THE IMPOSITION OF ASHES

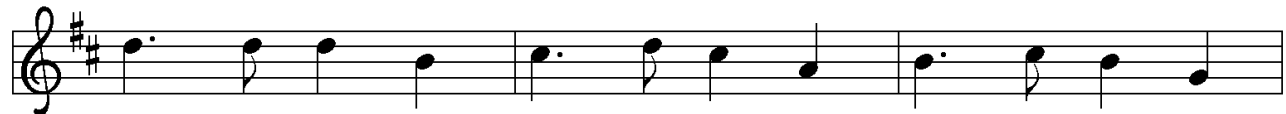
Healer of Our Every Ill (ELW 612)



Heal - er of our ev - 'ry ill, light of each to - mor - row,



give us peace be - yond our fear, and hope be - yond our sor - row.



- 1 You who know our fears and sad - ness, grace us with your
- 2 In the pain and joy be - hold - ing how your grace is
- 3 Give us strength to love each oth - er, ev - 'ry sis - ter,
- 4 You who know each thought and feel - ing, teach us all your



peace and glad - ness; Spir - it of all com - fort, fill our hearts.
still un - fold - ing, give us all your vi - sion, God of love.
ev - 'ry broth - er; Spir - it of all kind - ness, be our guide.
way of heal - ing; Spir - it of com - pas - sion, fill each heart.

Refrain

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Led by the Spirit, let us turn to God in prayer for the church, the world, and all those in need.

God of our journeys, we pray for the church as the season of Lent begins. Guide your people in spiritual practices and preparation for baptism. Strengthen communities of faith in discipleship and witness for the sake of the gospel. God, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

God of creation, we pray for the earth. As you once brought forth life from the dust, breathe healing and renewal into all places where ecosystems are stretched and strained. Nurture organic cycles of life, death, and rebirth. God, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

God of the nations, we pray for an end to wars and occupations that reduce communities to ash. Turn leaders away from fearful decision-making, and lead all people into the justice and compassion of your reign. God, in your mercy,
receive our prayer.

God of the suffering, we pray for all who live with any pain (*especially*). Comfort people living with chronic or terminal illnesses, addictions, or anxiety. Grant that all who dwell in the dust of grief may know your presence there. God, in your mercy,
receive our prayer.

God of community, we pray for those who accompany the dying: for first responders, health care and hospice workers, chaplains, and those who facilitate burials of the dead. Sustain them as they serve their neighbors in life and death with dignity and care. God, in your mercy,
receive our prayer.

God of the cross, we give thanks for those who have completed their lives on earth and have returned to you. Strengthen us with the promise that within the ashes of death are the seeds of resurrection life. God, in your mercy,
receive our prayer.

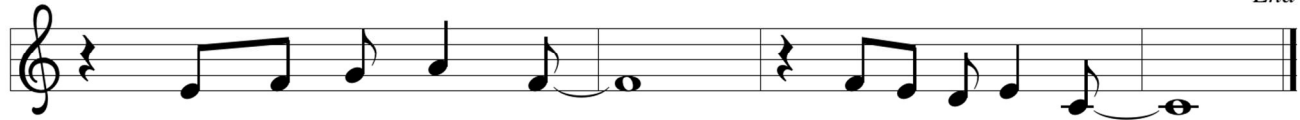
Receive the prayers of your people and draw all things together in your love, in the name of Jesus, who leads us from death to life.

Amen.

OFFERING *Change My Heart, O God* (ELW 801)



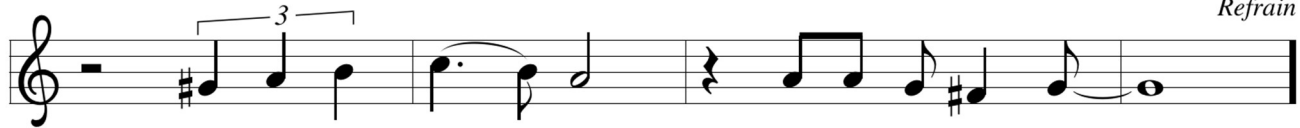
Change my heart, O God; make it ev - er true.



Change my heart, O God; may I be like you.



You are the pot - ter; I am the clay.



Mold me and make me; this is what I pray.

PRAYER

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. **C Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

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.

DISMISSAL

A 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. C **Thanks be to God.**

Upcoming Commemorations

Perpetua and Felicity and companions, martyrs at Carthage, died 202 ~ Friday, March 7, 2025

Vibia Perpetua, a noblewoman, and Felicity, an enslaved woman, were catechumens at Carthage, northern Africa. They, with four other catechumens, had defied the Roman emperor who had forbidden conversions to Christianity, and were put to death in the amphitheater.

Harriet Tubman, died 1913; Sojourner Truth, died 1883; renewers of society ~ Monday, March 10, 2025

Harriet Tubman, born into slavery, helped about 300 others to escape slavery until the institution was abolished. Sojourner Truth, whose birth name was Isabella, was freed after slavery was abolished, and discerned a call to be a preacher. Taking the name Sojourner Truth, she set out on an evangelistic journey, where people found her testimony to be deeply moving.

Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome, died 604 ~ Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Born into wealth and power, Gregory was for a time the chief administrator of the city of Rome. Giving this up for a life in the church, he was elected pope in 590. He influenced public worship through the establishment of a lectionary and prayers to correlate with the readings. Gregorian chant is named in his honor.

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