

Observing Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, a time in the church calendar where we undergo a discipline that helps us become better disciples. Lent was traditionally a time set aside for catechumens to learn about the faith before their Easter baptism. Although you'll hear people talk about giving something up for Lent, giving something up for Lent is like pruning dead branches off a plant so that energy can be directed toward new growth. Lent isn't about dying; it's about discipline so that new life can emerge, which sometimes means dying to what is dead (and death-dealing) in and among us so that there is room for the vigor of new life.

Traditional Ash Wednesday services include an imposition of ashes, which is the marking of an ashen cross on our foreheads with the pastor's thumb dipped in a little olive oil mixed with the ashes of last year's Palm Sunday branches. The elements used for the imposition of ashes are important to note. In the ancient world people used ashes to symbolize their mourning upon a death and to signify sorrow for their sins. Olive oil was used to anoint people at death, to help with childbirth, to light lamps and to wash. Perfumed olive oil was used to anoint prophets, priests and kings for service to God. Notice the double meaning of both the olive oil and ashes, meanings pertaining to both life and death. The mark of the cross upon the forehead is God's mark of grace upon us that we might not die even though we are obvious sinners. Indeed, the sign of the cross, spiritually branded upon us at our baptism, marks us as God's own beloved, sealing us against the deadly power of the Adversary. Through the grace of Christ, we are destined ultimately for life, not death. Though the words during the imposition of ashes remind us of our mortality ("Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return"), they are uttered simultaneously with the sign of the cross to remind us of our baptism into Christ's mortal death and life eternal.

First Presbyterian Church



ASH
WEDNESDAY

**503 W. 6th Street
Red Wing, MN 55066
(651) 388-9483**

www.firstpresbyterianredwing.com

First Presbyterian Church
Red Wing, MN

Rev. Greg Bolt, Rev. Heidi Bolt
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GATHERING AROUND THE WORD

(Please find your seat in silence. There is information on the last page of the bulletin about Ash Wednesday if you would like to read this during your time of reflection before worship.)

**Please rise in body or spirit*

*CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Let us worship God. God sent Christ into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Many: God's love endures forever.

One: God is our refuge and strength, a present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though the waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

Many: God's love endures forever.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

THE WORD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

FIRST READING

Joel 2:1–2, 12–17

SECOND READING

2 Corinthians 5:20–

6:10

*HYMN #372

Lord, I Want to Be a

Christian

GOSPEL READING

Luke 9: 51-62

Accept our repentance, O God, for the wrongs we have done. For our neglect of human need and suffering and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,

Accept our repentance, O God.

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us,

Accept our repentance, O God.

For our waste and pollution of your creation and our lack of concern for those who come after us,

Accept our repentance, O God.

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

Favorably hear us, O God, for your mercy is great.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

People are invited to come forward to receive the imposition of ashes.

SENDING

*HYMN (see insert)

Come, O Lord, and set us free

BLESSING AND CHARGE

All silently depart

**INVITATION TO THE OBSERVANCE OF THE
LENTEN DISCIPLINE**

TIME OF SILENCE

(Silence is kept for reflection and self-examination.)

PSALM 51

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; in your great compassion blot out my offenses.
- 2 **Wash me through and through from my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin.**
- 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 **Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.**
And so you are justified when you speak and upright in your judgment.
- 5 **Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, a sinner from my mother's womb.**
- 6 For behold, you look for truth deep within me, and will make me understand wisdom secretly.
- 7 **Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.**
- 8 Make me hear of joy and gladness, that the body you have broken may rejoice.
- 9 **Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities.**
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
- 11 **Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me.**
- 12 Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.
- 13 **I shall teach your ways to the wicked, and sinners shall return to you.**
- 14 Deliver me from death, O God, and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness, O God of my salvation.

- 15 **Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.**
- 16 Had you desired it, I would have offered sacrifice, but you take no delight in burnt offerings.
- 17 **The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.**

LITANY OF PENITENCE

Holy and merciful God, we confess to you and to one another, and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth, that we have sinned by our own 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 not listened 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.

We confess to you, O God, all our past unfaithfulness: The pride, hypocrisy, and impatience in our lives,

We confess to you, O God.

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways and our exploitation of other people,

We confess to you, O God.

Our anger at our own frustration and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,

We confess to you, O God.

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work,

We confess to you, O God.

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,

We confess to you, O God.