

Ash Wednesday - Script February 14th, 2024

Meditation – Rev. Debra

Be still and know that I am God
Be still and know that I am
Be still and know that I
Be still and know that
Be still and know
Be still and
Be still
Be

Welcome and Introduction to Ash Wednesday – Emily

Welcome everyone to our service this evening, What an honour it is to be with you tonight.

Today is Ash Wednesday, the first day of the season of Lent. Lent is a very old tradition that began in the early church as new believers were preparing to be baptized. In the forty days before Easter, the candidates were called to spend time in fasting and prayer, serving the poor and developing other disciplines of a Christian life. They were called to give up everything in their lives that was separating them from God, as they prepared their hearts and minds, bodies and souls for baptism. On Easter morning, they would be baptized, reborn into a new life in Christ.

It is interesting to remember, that the practices that candidates for baptism took on, were things that baptized Christians were expected to do all year round. Over a thousand years later, Lent has become an important time for all Christians to reevaluate our lives. It is a time for us to renew our commitment to God, and leave behind all the things that separate us from the love of God.

Today's service has two parts. First, we will repent, or confess our sins. The scriptures remind us that we do not repent or confess our sins for God's benefit- God knows us already -God loves us as we are. The prophet Joel says, "God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." We confess our sins for our own benefit. We confess our sins so that we can let go of them, turn away from them, and move on.

So that's the first step. Second, we will place ashes on our heads.

In the same way, we do not put ashes on our heads for the benefit of others, but for ourselves. To remember, that like Adam and Eve who were made from the earth and God gave them breath, we are all creations of God, created out of the dust, and one day, we will all go back to the dust. At that time, you will be invited to come forward, and receive the mark of ashes on your forehead, or on the back of your hand.

Today, we do not repent and put ashes on our heads in order to feel miserable, but so that we can let go of all the things that make us miserable and be filled with the Joy of God. Ashes represent our humanity and our humility, an opportunity to honour the one who created the universe out of the dust, the one who rises from the dust, and the one who transforms death to new life.

So, as you begin this forty-day journey, remember that this journey is between you and God. The things that you will choose to let go of, or take on, are personal. And tonight, as you take time to refocus and recommit your life to God, know that you are one of God's incredible creations. Know that in this community, you are welcome and loved, and that you are not alone.

Candle Lighting – Emily

As we begin our Lenten journey together. We remember that we are surrounded by the light of Christ and the waters of baptism: We have nothing to fear from the truth which sets us free. Let us turn with confidence to the grace of God.

HYMN - 135 MV Called By Earth and Sky

Call to Worship – Rev. Debra

Friends and neighbors, we pause to observe Ash Wednesday together as a faith community. **We remember that God made us from fragile, blessed dust and breathes through us the breath of life and love.** From dust we are created in God's image and to God's dust we shall return. **With dust and oil we claim the mark of God's beloved creature.** Today we begin our 40-day Lenten journey to discover who we are created to be as God's beloved. **In daily practices of prayer and service we will embark upon this Lenten journey.** We follow Jesus, God's Beloved Child, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh in whom we see God's image most clearly. **So come, let us pray for strength and imagination to follow Jesus wherever he will lead us this Lent.**

Invitation to Confession – Rev. Debra

Lent is a journey of deepening reflection and renewal,
An opportunity to make new commitments in faith.
We prepare for the journey by setting aside burdens that would weigh us down.
Let us turn to God and confess our sin.

Confession – Rev. Debra

For the times when we are too rushed to care,
When we are too tired to bother,
When we don't really listen,
When we act from motives other than love,
God, forgive us.

Silence

For our incapacity to feel the sufferings of others,
And our tendency to live comfortably with injustice,

God, forgive us.

Silence

For our failings in community,
Our lack of understanding,

God, forgive us.

Silence

For our lack of forgiveness, openness, sensitivity,

God, forgive us.

Silence

For the self-righteousness that denies guilt,
And the self-interest that strangles compassion,

God, forgive us.

Silence

Assurance – Rev. Debra

Know that God loves you, forgives you, welcomes you and rejoices in you.

Holy God, renew us as we begin this journey of transformation. Restore us as we strive to be our most compassionate selves. Revive us when we feel that all is lost. Help us to mend what has broken, for the sake of justice and mercy as we walk humbly with you. Amen.

HYMN 835 VU Praise to the Lord

Scripture – Emily PSALM 103:8-18

Reflection – The Flower –

When we love someone, or when something special happens, we often give flowers. We could be giving or receiving flowers today to celebrate the ones we love on Valentine's Day. We have flowers at weddings, and at funerals, at church on Sunday. Rev. Debra received flowers for her birthday this month.

Flowers are some of the most beautiful and incredible creations of God. We can also buy artificial flowers, and they last forever. So that means they're better right? Part of what makes real flowers special is that God made them. They're all unique- and they are incredibly beautiful. But they are also much more special *because they don't last forever.*

Tonight, like the flowers, we remember that each of us is a unique and beautiful creation of God, and we remember that our lives on this earth do not last forever. But that only makes our lives more beautiful, more valuable. Tonight, my prayer for you is that when

you receive the sign of the ashes, and hear the words, you are dust, and to dust you shall return. That you hear it as a call to remember how valuable you are, how much God loves you, and that in your Lenten prayers and practice, you will remember that Lent is about valuing our lives and the lives of others; about honouring God who created all things from the dust.

And finally, Let us remember, that when the petals do fall, there is a seed. So tonight, even as we acknowledge our mortality, we also remember that our creator has placed the seeds for new life, deep in the dust. Amen.

Imposition of Ashes – Emily (Emily and Rev. Debra to stand together to put ashes on folks- hands or foreheads- two lines may form, we may go to those who cannot come up as needed)

All are invited to come forward to receive ashes on their foreheads or hands;

*Remember that you are God's beloved dust,
and to God's beloved dust you shall return. (or whatever you like to say!)*

HYMN 79 MV Spirit Open My Heart

Blessing – Rev. Debra

May God be with us in our fasting, mourning, and hoping.
May there be restoration of joy, cleansing of heart, and renewing of spirit.
May breaches be repaired. May broken walls be mended.
May we, like dust, awaken to the ever-constant change that shapes us.
Let us go forth and build where all seems broken.

Rev. Debra Berg and Rev. Emily Carr