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February 17, 2021
Ash Wednesday

INTRODUCTION

Lent begins with a solemn call to fasting and repentance as we begin our journey to the baptismal waters of Easter. As we hear in today's readings, now is the acceptable time to return to the Lord. During Lent the people of God will reflect on the meaning of their baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. The sign of ashes suggests our human mortality and frailty. What seems like an ending is really an invitation to make each day a new beginning, in which we are washed in God's mercy and forgiveness. With the cross on our brow, we long for the spiritual renewal that flows from the springtime Easter feast to come.

PSALM 51: Psalm 51:1–18

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your lovingkindness;
 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 transgressions,
 and my sin is ever before me.
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.
Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth,
 a sinner from my mother's womb.
For behold, you look for truth deep within me,
 and will make me understand wisdom secretly.
Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure;
 wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.
Make me hear of joy and gladness,
 that the body you have broken may rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
 and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
 and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence,
 and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Give me the joy of your saving help again,
 and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.
I shall teach your ways to the wicked,
 and sinners shall return to you.

Deliver me from death, O God,
and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness, O God of¹ my salvation.
Open my lips, O Lord,
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.
Had you desired it, I would have offered sacrifice,
but you take no delight in burnt-offerings.
The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
Be favorable and gracious to Zion,
and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
Then you will be pleased with the appointed sacrifices,
with burnt-offerings and oblations;
then shall they offer young bullocks upon your altar.
**C: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen**

EXHORTATION

P: Brothers and sisters: God created us to experience joy in communion with him, to love all humanity, and to live in harmony with all of his creation. But sin separates us from God, our neighbors, and creation, and so we do not enjoy the life our Creator intended for us. Also, by our sin we grieve our Father, who does not desire us to come under his judgment, but to turn to him and live.

As disciples of the Lord Jesus we are called to struggle against everything that leads us away from love of God and neighbor. Repentance, fasting, prayer, and works of love—the discipline of Lent—help us to wage our spiritual warfare. I invite you, therefore, to commit yourselves to this struggle and confess your sins, asking our Father for strength to persevere in your Lenten discipline.

CONFESSION

P: Most holy and merciful Father:

C: 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.

P: 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, Lord.

P: We have been deaf 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, Lord.

P: We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness. The pride, hypocrisy, and impatience in our lives,

C: we confess to you, Lord.

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

C: we confess to you, Lord.

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

C: we confess to you, Lord.

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

C: we confess to you, Lord.

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

C: we confess to you, Lord.

P: Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done. For our blindness to human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,

C: accept our repentance, Lord.

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

C: accept our repentance, Lord.

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

C: accept our repentance, Lord.

P: Restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart from us.

C: Hear us, Lord, for your mercy is great. Amen

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: Let us pray.

C: 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 obtain from you, the God of all mercy, full pardon and forgiveness; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

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

L: A reading from Joel.

Because of the coming Day of the Lord, the prophet Joel calls the people to a community lament. The repentant community reminds God of his gracious character and asks God to spare the people, lest the nations doubt God's power to save.

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?’ ”

L: The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

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

L: A reading from 2 Corinthians.

The ministry of the gospel endures many challenges and hardships. Through this ministry, God's reconciling activity in the death of Christ reaches into the depths of our lives to bring us into a right relationship with God. In this way, God accepts us into the reality of divine salvation.

^{20b}We 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.

^{6:1}As 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.

L: The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

☩ Re - turn to the Lord, your God, for he is gra - cious and
mer - ci - ful, slow to an - ger, and a - bound - ing in
stead - fast love, and a - bound - ing in stead - fast love.

GOSPEL:

P: 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.

²So 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.

⁵And 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.

¹⁶And 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.

¹⁹Do 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.

P: The Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

HYMN: *Just as I Am, without One Plea* (ELW 592)

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

P: Led by Christ in our journey of repentance and moved by his compassion, let us pray for the church, those in need, and all of God's creation.

P: Holy God, you gather your people in solemn assembly. Grant us grace, so that we may observe a holy Lent through fasting, prayer, and works of love. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: You give bountifully to your creatures. Provide for all animals whose winter rations are dwindling, and prepare the earth for renewal in coming weeks. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: You move your people to cry out for justice. Bring to light all the ways in which we oppress others. Turn us from our complacency, and move us to work on behalf of the oppressed. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: You lift up the poor. Care for all who know poverty of any kind: of health, of daily needs, of spirit (*especially*). Pour your abundant mercy upon them. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: You turn people from their sin to live for you alone. Renew us in the covenant of baptism, that we might live in hope of a creation reconciled and restored. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: As we remember saints who have gone before us (*especially Elizabeth Fedde, deaconess*), guide us in our journey and open our lives to the cleansing and renewing power of your abundant forgiveness. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

C: Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**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

P: 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

For us, the reflection and penitence for our faith-life which is the theme of Lent may begin appropriately with the Ash Wednesday liturgy and the imposition of ashes. Ashes are a powerful symbol both of repentance and renewal. As early as the Third Century, Tertullian mentions ashes as an external sign of public penitence. By the Ninth Century, the imposition of ashes came to be done on the first day of Lent: thus Ash Wednesday.

The liturgy of the Lutheran Church provides for the use of ashes in the service of this day; we offer them tonight as a part of our Lenten devotional opportunities.

Through the use of ashes, we are reminded 'from dust you were taken and to dust you shall return' (Genesis 3:19; Psalm 90:3), of our dependence upon God for our lives (Psalm 104:29), and of God's call to repent (Matthew 11:21, Luke 10:13). Ashes become a visible sign of our sinfulness and of our turning away from sin, of our fear before God's judgment by fire and of our hope in God's redemption through the waters of Baptism. The imposition of ashes may give us a broader understanding and appreciation of God's righteousness, power, and love.

All Tuesday Lenten services will begin at 6:00 p.m.

Tuesday, February 23	Lent 1
Tuesday, March 2	Lent 2
Tuesday, March 9	Lent 3
Tuesday, March 16	Lent 4
Tuesday, March 23	Lent 5

We hope you will join us through this "Journey of Lent."

One way for us to approach Lent is to remember that we emerge out of the darkness of sin's winter, a different people -- the church -- reborn through baptism into our Lord's death and resurrection. And knowing this, we can enter this 40-day season of self-examination, repentance and renewal filled with hope. But there are some things about Lent that you probably don't know ... like:

a. The original period of Lent was 40 hours ... a time spent fasting to commemorate the suffering of Christ. It wasn't until about

800 AD ... during the reign of Charlemagne, that lent became a season spanning 40 days (not including Sundays).

b. The 40 days of lent correspond to Christ's 40 days in the wilderness (Mark 1:13).

c. The date of Lent is determined by the date of Easter ... which, according to the Council of Nicea (325 AD), determined that Easter would be observed on the first Sunday following the 14th day of the Paschal moon.

d. The earliest Lent can begin, then, is February 5th. The last time that happened was in 1818 ... and will not occur again in the 20th century.

e. The latest Lent can start is March 10 ... and it won't be that late again until the year 2038.

f. Lent comes from the old English word, "lenten," which means Spring. The wearing of sackcloth and ashes is an old custom going back to First Testament times. We continue that tradition wearing the ashes of last year's palm branches ... marked in the sign of the cross on our foreheads.

But ... as interesting as all this might be, all these facts are really not that important. What IS important for our lives is remembering that Christ died so that our sins might be forgiven!

Lent gives us a chance to think about this ... to think about our sins ... and what it means that Christ died to give us another chance.

Lent, also, gives us a time to attend church more regularly; to pray more often; to be more faithful in reading the Bible; and to spread the Good News more earnestly.

May this Lenten season be the most important ... and the most "life renewing" 40 days of your life!

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DO YOU WANT TO FAST THIS LENT?

In the words of Pope Francis

- Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
- Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.
- Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
- Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
- Fast from worries and have trust in God.
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
- Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy.
- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
- Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
- Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

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