



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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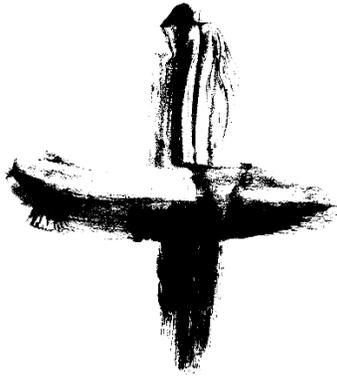
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Ash Wednesday February 22, 2023

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.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping with us in-person and to those on-line. Here at Grace Lutheran we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God’s calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God’s mission in the world.

Grace Lutheran worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 51:1-17

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

²**Wash me through and through from my wickedness,
and cleanse me from my sin.**

³For I know my offenses,
and my sin is ever before me.

⁴**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.**

⁵Indeed, I was born steeped in wickedness,
a sinner from my mother's womb.

⁶**Indeed, you delight in truth deep within me,
and would have me know wisdom deep within.**

⁷Remove my sins with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be purer than snow.

⁸**Let me hear joy and gladness;
that the body you have broken may rejoice.**

⁹Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my wickedness.

¹⁰**Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.**

¹¹Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

¹²**Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.**

¹³Let me teach your ways to offenders,
and sinners shall be restored to you.

¹⁴**Rescue me from bloodshed, O God of my salvation,
and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness.**

¹⁵O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

¹⁶**For you take no delight in sacrifice, or I would give it.
You are not pleased with burnt offering.**

¹⁷The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit;
a troubled and broken heart, O God, you will not despise.

GATHERING HYMN: I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say (#611)

REETING (p. 251)

The mercy of God,
The steadfast love of Christ,
And the great compassion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And also with you.

KYRIE (p. 203)

PRAYER OF THE DAY (p. 251)

Let us pray.

God of our salvation, we long to be reconciled to you. Help us in our acceptance of your grace, that regardless of what life might bring, we may face it with increasing knowledge and patience, kindness and holiness of spirit, genuine love and truthful speech, by your power at work within us, through us, and in spite of us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

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

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?'"

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

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

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.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 142)

GOSPEL: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commends almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, but emphasizes that spiritual devotion must not be done for show.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹"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.

²"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. 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.

⁵“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. 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.

¹⁶“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. 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.

¹⁹“Do 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.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON (p. 252)

God of mercy, we need the light of your Word to break forth through the darkness and guide us in even the parched places of life into your waters of blessing and grace. May your love be revealed to us throughout this season and always, spoken to us by Jesus through the power of your Spirit. **Amen.**

Another Ash Wednesday. I think I start every one of my Ash Wednesday sermons with those exact words in that exact order. It's just that it's hard to get these days in the church calendar that are big enough to have a service for but not big enough that people would actually show up to them. And it's especially hard when the texts for the day are the exact same year after year, no exceptions. And while there are few enough people that I could probably get away with using the same sermon as last year, I'm just not a "reuse my sermon" kind of guy. Actually, I might have used that joke before, so I'm just a "reuse old jokes" kind of guy. No sermons, just jokes.

Anyway, so it's hard to come up with something new with the same familiar texts. It's hard to look at the same words and see something different. It's hard to say something about this that hasn't been said before. Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining or anything, mostly because God is good and something jumped out at me this time around. And that is how the Jesus concludes this text with, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

I know what you're thinking, "That's it?!? That doesn't sound special at all. Any cereal box or fortune cookie could have told us that!" And I'll admit that I didn't say that it was super profound, but it's just something that jumped out at me because of the context in which this line comes.

Again, we're familiar with it. Jesus tells us to give, pray, fast, in secret, don't showboat all the churchy stuff that we do. Well, except for getting ashes on Ash Wednesday, you can wear that loud and proud. But for everything else, Jesus says do in secret because God who sees in secret will reward you. The reward we assume would be these treasures that Jesus talks about stored in heaven and not on earth. And that is where he drops this line, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be."

Because honestly? For me to make sense of Jesus' teaching I would think it should be the other way around. I think Jesus means "where your *heart* is, there your *treasure* will be." Now it's a bit more profound, right?

I know, it's like a chicken or egg thing. There's no real answer, is there? Well, we might think so with Jesus' words because the grammar is just there, we can't deny what he said. But akin to the chicken and egg debate, I start to wonder if there even needs to be a distinction of what comes first? Are they mutually exclusive concepts? I mean with the chicken and egg, I would argue that the egg contains the chicken and the chicken contains the egg. We can't say what comes first because they're part of the same thing. Sure, maybe the state in which they appear might be different, but it still it's just a chicken.

And so when Jesus talks about where to store treasures, I believe he's talking about where to put our heart. As in, where do we put our trust, our faith, our hope? Because where we put our heart helps us to see the treasures we've been given. Treasures of grace, mercy, and love. If our heart is in the ways of the world, then we will yearn for the things of this world. But if our heart is in God, then our eyes will be more open to seeing how we can live the life that truly is life, one that is full of the joy of the Lord and blesses us with God's presence in and through our community.

But what does all this have to do with Ash Wednesday and this season of Lent? This season is usually about letting go of the things that bring us joy and fasting from the things that fill us. The discipline for this time of year is usually more about scarcity than it is about riches. We associate Lent usually as a time of want, not a time of plenty.

I think I just figured out why this day and season aren't all that popular, guys.

But that is just how Lent seems to be advertised, right? We're told that it's a time of reflection, of repentance, of relinquishing something that we love as a fast and discipline to "prove" our devotion and discipleship. Not really big selling points. We like what we like so giving it up isn't pleasant. We enjoy the things we enjoy and not being able to enjoy them anymore is just not enjoyable. We want what we want and we'd rather not have to give them up.

Well, unless our heart is in a different place.

See there isn't anything wrong with liking things, enjoying things, or wanting things. There isn't anything wrong with having things, doing things, and being things. There isn't anything wrong with living in the world. But the point is that the danger is when these things define us, drive us, and determine our joy. The problem is when they possess our thoughts, pervade our dreams, and have the sole proprietorship on who we are. The hardship comes from these things of the world having the handle on our happiness, our hope, and our heart. When this happens, Jesus promises us that we will have our apt reward.

And so Jesus also tells us that perhaps our happiness is perhaps better found in things not as fleeting. Jesus tells us that maybe we should put our hope in things more eternal and everlasting. Jesus reveals to us that having our hearts in heaven releases us from the pressures of the rat race, the stress of keeping up with the Joneses, the guilt of not appearing to be good enough, rich enough, or faithful enough for this world.

This is what Lent does for us. It reminds us that we needn't hold on so tightly to the world, for it will pass. It reminds us that we needn't put too much emphasis on the image that we put before others because that doesn't affect our position and identity as God's beloved people. It reminds us that our joy needn't be found in our possessions and pleasures, as we are defined by God's Spirit, saved by God's grace, and marked by God's steadfast and eternal love.

For we are but dust, and to dust we shall return.

See even in the temporary life that we have here on this planet, we continue to be loved. Even in the midst of all the temptations and indulgences that we fall for, we continue to be forgiven and saved. Even in all the places we might find ourselves putting our hearts in, we continue to be blessed with the treasures of heaven, the treasures of truth, peace, and hope.

In a few moments we will be receiving the mark of the ashes on our foreheads. May that mark serve as a reminder of this season of Lent and all that it stands for, a reminder of who we are and whose we are, a reminder that where our hearts are, so also will our treasure be seen.

And so on this Ash Wednesday, this season of Lent, and beyond into the rest of the church year, may we always see God working in and around us, loving us both as saint and sinner, and redeeming us that our hearts be empowered to serve God and others living in community together as the body of Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Healer of Our Every Ill (#612)

INVITATION TO LENT (p. 252)

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 (p. 252)

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

Most holy and merciful God,
**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.

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.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our past unfaithfulness, the pride, envy, hypocrisy, and apathy that have infected our lives, we confess to you.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people, we confess to you.

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.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our neglect of human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty, we confess to you.

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.

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.

Have mercy on us, O God.

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

Hear us, O God, for your mercy is great.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES (p. 254)

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.

Amen.

HYMN: Take, Oh, Take Me As I Am (#814)

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.

PRAYER (p. 254)

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.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 112)

Joined together both by mortality and everlasting life, let us pray as Jesus taught us:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

BLESSING

May the God who hears and listens to our calling out,
the God who reconciles us with grace and mercy,
the God whose power sustains us throughout these Lenten days and beyond,
bless you, keep you, and remain with you, now and always.

Amen.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, give, pray, fast, and hold onto what is good.

Thanks be to God.

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