

Ash Wednesday

March 2, 2022

Bethlehem Lutheran Church Hermiston, Oregon

From Sackcloth & Ashes to Robes of Righteousness

As We Gather

Sackcloth and ashes are signs of mourning and repentance in the pages of Scripture. Today, we begin our Lenten journey. Today, we begin our return from exile. This is not a journey that begins with rejoicing and excitement; it begins with ashes. Our Lenten journey begins with ashes on our foreheads, a sign of broken and repentant hearts. God does not desire our sacrifices, as if we could atone for or cover our own sin. God desires broken and contrite hearts which He will not despise (Psalm 51:17). Any efforts to cover up, to pay for, or to atone for our own sin only result in more sackcloth and ashes, even death. It is God Who responds to the ashes of our repentance by sending His only-begotten Son. Jesus Christ, on the cross, has washed our foreheads of the ashes of our sins, has removed the sackcloth of our guilt, and has clothed us in His robes of righteousness and garments of salvation. The pure and holy white linen garments that adorn the saints in heaven cover us as we long for the day when we will join them around the throne.

+ Preparation +

Invocation

P: In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

Address

P: Historically, the forty days of Lent were a time for catechumens to be instructed in the Christian faith. It was a journey of faith, culminating in their being baptized during the Easter Vigil and then participating in the Lord's Supper for the first time. This year, our Lenten spiritual journey begins from exile in the wilderness of sin and death. But do not be surprised to discover that from the very beginning, as if just outside the gates of the Garden of Eden, it is Christ Who travels with us. We enter this Lenten season contemplating the reality of our earthly journey but with eyes fixed on the destination — the empty tomb and the open gates of everlasting life. What joy there is in knowing that we do not walk alone!

Opening Sentences

P: We are children of Adam and Eve, who were expelled from the Garden of Eden for eating the forbidden fruit. When the Lord God came looking for them, they hid, because, as Adam said,

C: "I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." Genesis 3:10

P: Although life would be hard for all people, God told the serpent about a descendant of Eve, that

C: "He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." Genesis 3:15

P: Moreover, before He barred them from the Tree of Life, God already showed them mercy, for

C: the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. Genesis 3:21

P: Confident that when our Lord Jesus rose on Easter, He crushed Satan as He conquered sin, death, and everlasting condemnation, let us hear in faith God's call to repent as we begin our journey from exile.

Old Testament Reading

Joel 2:12–19

"Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and He relents over disaster. 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; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber.

¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep and say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and make not Your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

¹⁸Then the LORD became jealous for His land and had pity on His people. ¹⁹The LORD answered and said to His people, "Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Confession

P: Our gracious God has sent us more than physical food. He has sent His Word in the flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ. Because for His sake God offers us full and free pardon, let us confess our sins.

Silence for reflection on God's Word and for self-examination.

P: Most merciful God,

C: we confess that by ourselves we deserve to be exiled from Your gracious presence. We are by nature sinful and unclean, and we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed. In Your grace and mercy, forgive us and accompany us in our journey to the Paradise You have promised because of the sacrifice of Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Imposition of Ashes

P: Ashes have been a sign of repentance and contrition over the centuries. They are a reminder that, without the mercy of almighty God, we deserve the spiritual death of God's warning in Eden. We are dust, and to dust we shall return.

*Those desiring ashes come forward as directed.
While worshipers receive ashes, the congregation sings . . .*

Hymn #419 "Savior, When in Dust to Thee"

Savior, when in dust to Thee
Low we bow the_adoring knee;
When, repentant, to the skies
Scarce we lift our weeping eyes;
O, by all Thy pains and woe
Suffered once for us below,
Bending from Thy throne on high,
Hear our penitential cry!

By Thy helpless infant years,
By Thy life of want and tears,
By Thy days of deep distress
In the savage wilderness,
By the dread, mysterious hour
Of the insulting tempter's pow'r,
Turn, O turn a fav'ring eye;
Hear our penitential cry!

By Thine hour of dire despair,
By Thine agony of prayer,
By the cross, the nail, the thorn,
Piercing spear, and torturing scorn,
By the gloom that veiled the skies
O'er the dreadful sacrifice,
Listen to our humble sigh;
Hear our penitential cry!

By Thy deep expiring groan,
By the sad sepulchral stone,
By the vault whose dark abode
Held in vain the rising God,
O, from earth to heav'n restored,
Mighty, reascended Lord,
Bending from Thy throne on high,
Hear our penitential cry!

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Absolution

P: In the Garden of Eden, our gracious God covered our naked, sinful parents with garments of skins. But in the Paradise promised to us, we shall be clothed with white robes of Christ's own righteousness. Even now, as His baptized children, our heavenly Father looks on us with our sins washed away. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

+ Word +

Hymn #435 "Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain"

Come to Calv'ry's holy mountain, Sinners, ruined by the fall;
Here a pure and healing fountain Flows for you, for me, for all,
In a full, perpetual tide,
Opened when our Savior died.

Come in poverty and meanness,
Come defiled, without, within;
From infection and uncleanness,
From the leprosy of sin,
Wash your robes and make them white;
Ye shall walk with God in light.

Come in sorrow and contrition,
Wounded, impotent, and blind;
Here the guilty, free remission,
Here the troubled, peace may find.
Health this fountain will restore;
They that drink shall thirst no more.

They that drink shall live forever;
'Tis a soul-renewing flood.
God is faithful; God will never
Break His covenant of blood,
Signed when our Redeemer died,
Sealed when He was glorified.

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Prayer for the Day

P: Let us pray. Almighty and everlasting God, You despise nothing You have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent.

C: Create in us new and contrite hearts that, lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, we may receive from You full pardon and forgiveness;

P: through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

New Testament Reading

Revelation 7:9–14

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,¹² saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Holy Gospel

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

P: Jesus teaches us to reflect our certain destination by changing how we live *en route* in the present, and He assures us that our heavenly Father is with us even in secret moments. The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the sixth chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

[Jesus said:] "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

² "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵ "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.⁶ But when 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 when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Hymn #572 "In the Shattered Bliss of Eden" *sung to: Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness*

In the shattered bliss of Eden
Dawned the day of sacrifice,
As our primal parents shuddered —
Sin had caused this dreadful price!
Faith embarked with this discernment:
Only God can cover sin,
As He took their leafy garments
And He clothed their shame with skin.
Days and months and years unfolding
Clearly showed what sin had wrought:
Fallen Adam's children learning
Lessons fallen parents taught.
All these sacrificial off'rings
Crested as a crimson flood:
Patriarchs and priests atoning
For their sins with cleansing blood.
What these sacrifices promised
From a God who sought to bless,
Came at last — a second Adam —
Priest and King of Righteousness:
Son of God, incarnate Savior,
Son of Man, both Christ and Lord,
Who in naked shame would offer
On the cross His blood outpoured.
Lamb of God, once slain for sinners,
Host, who spreads this meal divine,
Here You pledge our sins are covered,
Pledge received in bread and wine:
"Take and eat; this is My body,
Given on the cross for you.
Take and drink; this cup of blessing
Is My blood poured out for you."

Taste and see the bliss of heaven
Known by saints around the throne,
Where the Lamb, in closest union,
Lives to love and feed His own.
From His riven side forever
Flows the purest stream of love,
Love that robes us with the raiment
Worn by all who feast above.

Gone the bliss of Eden's garden,
Gone the age of sacrifice;
Ours the time of grace and favor,
Ours the call to paradise!
Ever, Lord, impress upon us:
Only You can cover sin —
Take our worthless, self-made garments;
Clothe our shame and cleanse within.

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Sermon

Offering

Nicene Creed

**I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth
and of all things visible and invisible.**

**And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of His Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father,
by Whom all things were made;
Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary
and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
He suffered and was buried.
And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures
and ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of the Father.
And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead,
Whose kingdom will have no end.**

And I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and giver of life,
Who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified,
Who spoke by the prophets.
And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,
and I look for the resurrection of the dead
and the life \dagger of the world to come. Amen.

Prayer of the Church

P: We are returning from exile, listening to the inviting Word of God, full of grace and truth. Let us respond to Him in prayer. Gracious God, offering full and free forgiveness,

C: we come in spiritual sackcloth and ashes, painfully aware of our sins and failings. Graciously wash us and clothe us with the robe of Christ's own righteousness so that we may live eternally with all Your saints.

P: Eden's Lord and ours,

C: hear us and all who call out to You in pain and sorrow, sweat or tears. Remind us of Your painful victory over every temptation, and strengthen us to follow where You have led the way.

P: Loving Father, calling us to Mount Calvary,

C: remove from us our fear of Your righteous judgment for our sins; strengthen our faith in the all-availing sacrifice of Your Son in our stead.

P: Spirit of life,

C: remind us again of our Baptism, in which our old Adam was drowned; strengthen us to live in the freedom of the children of God.

P: Lord Jesus, Savior and Guide,

C: give us the eyes of faith to see the tree of life awaiting us in heaven, and guide us to follow where You have led the way.

P: Protecting Father,

C: assure us of Your presence on our journey through the desert of this world and bring us at last to the paradise purchased by Your Son.

P: O Holy Spirit,

C: nourish our faith and restore our souls each time we come to the Table of the Lord and receive His body and blood, a foretaste of the feast to come.

P: Holy and merciful Lord over all,

C: we feel the burden of our sin; renew in us the firm faith that Your Son has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, giving His life for ours.

P: Everlasting Father,

C: Our Savior has conquered death. Fill us with rejoicing, confident that we shall therefore gather around the eternal throne of the Lamb, Your Son, Who with You and the Holy Spirit are one God, now and forever. Amen.

P: Lord, remember us in Your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**C: 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.**

Words of Institution

DID YOU KNOW? Did you know that when the Pastor makes the sign of the cross over the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper he is NOT blessing it? The Supper belongs to the Lord – it is His and He provides the blessing. By making the sign of the cross over the elements the Pastor is merely reminding the congregation that with the words of Christ spoken, a change has taken place. The bread is no longer merely bread – it is now the Body of Christ. The wine is no longer merely wine – it is now the very Blood of Jesus . . .

The Distribution

The Supper is celebrated this evening in silence for contemplation of our sins and Christ's love.

Dismissal

Luke 2:29-32

P: The Body and blood of our Lord strengthen and preserve you steadfast in the true faith to life everlasting.

C: Lord, now You let Your servant go in peace according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen the salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel.

Blessing

Jude 24-25

P: To Him Who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy —

C: to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

P: The Lord Almighty grant us a quiet night and peace at the last.

C: Amen

Hymn #878 "Abide with Me"

final verse will be sung a capella

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

I need Thy presence ev'ry passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's pow'r?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me.

Come not in terrors, as the King of kings,
But kind and good, with healing in Thy wings;
Tears for all woes, a heart for ev'ry plea.
Come, Friend of sinners, thus abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still if Thou abide with me!

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies.
Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

And when at last You come again to save,
Raise us to life and bring us from the grave!
And then with all Your people, strong and free
I shall rejoice, for You abide with me.

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verse 6 Written by Dr. Jeff Gibbs, Concordia Seminary, used with permission



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