

**“The Memory of Ashes”
A Virtual Service for the Lenten Journey**

Notes:

This service may be used during Lent or Holy Week.

*For this virtual service, **invite everyone to bring a candle, a note card and marker (or paper and pen) to mark their memory of ashes.***

If you are in the sanctuary, the paraments are purple, ash gray or black, and other coverings are plain or bare, set with wilderness items. The baptismal font or bowl may be filled with sand to offer a tangible reminder as people enter of the reflective journey through Lent, in contrast to the refreshing touch of water. The sand may remain throughout Lent for people to touch and remember the dry places in their lives that they want Jesus to touch; or you might handout strips of rough burlap for them to hold during the service and take home as a reminder.

In addition, you might provide prayer cards in the bulletin during Lent, to encourage prayer and devotion. Sometimes people need an invitation or reminder to spend time with God in prayer. Another reminder of the Lenten journey is to invite them to place a bowl of sand in their homes where they can see and touch the sand every day, not as a sign of gloom and doom but as a reminder of the freedom that God offers, and the promise that nothing can keep God’s love from us.

Depending on your time and format, use any of the readings for Ash Wednesday:

Joel 2:1-2,12-17; Psalm 51:1-17; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6,16-2.

Invite readers and use rituals that allow folks to pause and reflect on their Lenten journey.

Refer to BOW 321 for ideas and order of service.

Prelude “Ashes to Ashes”

Glory & Praise #260

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NM1MYet8kNc>

Welcome – Joon-Sik Park, Director of COSSO

Announcements – Grace Wallace, COSSO Coordinator

Introduction – Rebeka Maples, Director of Spiritual Formation

OPENING BLESSING FOR ASH WEDNESDAY

LEADER: So, let the ashes come, to mark the beginning,
the first sign but not the end.

**ALL: Let them rest in our memory
and take us through this wilderness,
the ashes know the way.**

L: May they mark us
with the memory of fire and of life,
the life that rises and returns and finds its way again.

A: See what shimmers and endures within the dust.

See how it draws us to the mystery

that will not destroy, but will blossom and bless us again.

L: Let us face those desert places in our lives,
remembering we will not go alone, Jesus has gone there before us.

(adapted from Jan Richardson <https://paintedprayerbook.com/the-memory-of-ashes>)

A UNISON PRAYER OF PREPARATION

LEADER: Let us pray together:

**ALL: God of desert places,
pray for us now and throughout these forty days.**

**Grant that the memory of ashes may be a sign
of your presence with us in each season of our lives,
and that when the final Easter dawns, we may join with you in everlasting joy,
and sing praises to your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.**

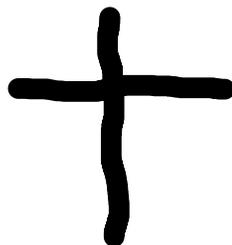
Amen.

MARKING THE JOURNEY OF LENT

LEADER: In this virtual remembrance of Ash Wednesday, you are invited to mark the sign of the cross on your note card or paper (with a marker or pen). Save the card and let it be a reminder of your Lenten journey. You might keep it in your Bible or with your prayer devotions as an assurance in the hope and light of resurrection on Easter morning.

To draw a cross on the shared whiteboard, go to “view options” on the Zoom menu and choose “annotate” (note: this option is not available in Zoom’s mobile apps). From the menu that opens, click “Draw” and click one of the ~ icons to draw your cross; and click the “Format” button to change the color you’re drawing in.

(PAUSE TO DRAW THE SIGN OF THE CROSS as you listen to the hymn)



SONG

“Breathe on Me Breath of God”

UMH 420

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmkzSjs9eAw>

ON THE LENTEN JOURNEY

LEADER: A reading from the prophet Joel 2:12-15,
Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
rend 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.
Who 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?

LEADER: Lord have mercy.

ALL: Christ have mercy.

A PRAYER OF CONFESSION (based on Psalm 51)

LEADER: We refer to Psalm 51 in our prayer of confession.
Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;

ALL: According to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

L: Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

A: For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

L: Lord have mercy.

A: Christ have mercy.

(prayerful pause)

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

LEADER: Our God is merciful and the Source of our salvation, who desires not that we live in sin or guilt but rather that we turn from evil, confess our wrongdoing, and accept forgiveness. Therefore, may the One who came to restore life, bless us and restore us by the Holy Spirit, for the living of new life in Christ.

In the name of Jesus Christ, know that you are forgiven.

ALL: In the name of Jesus Christ, we know that we are forgiven.

(prayerful pause)

ACT OF RECONCILIATION

LEADER: As we reflect on our Lenten journey, let us also pray that we may be open to ways that God may speak to us, through scripture and the actions or words of others. Sometimes we may use words to pray and sometimes silence. Whenever we pray, we are turning our lives into prayer and opening ourselves to following God, even to places we would rather not go.

Now, you are invited to write on your notecard a fast (action or practice) you want to “take on” or “give up” during Lent, something that may lead you closer to God. And may this be a reminder of “turning back” to God’s grace which is always present.

(PAUSE TO WRITE ON CARD)

UNISON PRAYER

LEADER: In this prayer, we will pause at the end for you to lift your own prayers. You may unmute your mic to share or type in the Chat Box.

Let us pray together, in the name of the One who loves us:

ALL: Loving God, you fill all things with a hope that we can never comprehend. Thank you for leading us into a time where more of reality is being unveiled for us to see. We pray that you will take away our natural temptation for cynicism, denial, fear and despair. Help us have the courage to awaken on Easter morning to greater truth, greater humility, and greater care for one another. During these forty days, may we place our hope in what matters and what lasts, trusting in your eternal presence and love. Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of our suffering world. Knowing, good God, you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer these prayers in your holy name... (YOU MAY LIFT YOUR OWN CONCERNS) ...

Amen.

(adapted from prayer by Richard Rohr <https://cac.org/2021-daily-meditations>)

BLESSING & SENDING FORTH

LEADER: In the Old Testament, anointing commonly represents a blessing or calling forth; in the New Testament it is a sign of love, marking followers of Christ, and reception of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As you light your candle, you are invited to receive the actions of this service as an anointing, a blessing or remembering that light always gets through, God is with you.

(PAUSE TO LIGHT A CANDLE)

LEADER: Remember God's love is with you in joy and sorrow.

ALL: We will observe a holy Lent; God's love is with us.

Continue on the desert way to places God calls you to go,
And may the blessing of Almighty God, Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit,
shine upon you and remain with you forever. Amen.

Postlude

"Just a Closer Walk with Thee"

TFWS 2158

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lh7Q4AOSONc>

Please feel free to sign out of the meeting as needed, or stay and enjoy the music.

References

Rebeka Maples, [God in Desert Places: An Ash Wednesday Service of taking on and letting go](https://www.ionabooks.com),

<https://www.ionabooks.com>

Jan Richardson, <https://paintedprayerbook.com/the-memory-of-ashes/>

Richard Rohr, <https://cac.org/2021-daily-meditations/>