

# Covenant News



**February 2021**

## *Pastor's Spin*



Siblings in Christ of Covenant,

Ash Wednesday has always been...complicated, to say the least, for many Christians. It seems to be so insistent in making us recognize our own personal mortality. Good Friday has its own sorrow, yes, when considering what Jesus went through to show us just how powerful love can be not just on that fateful afternoon, but for all eternity. But, Ash Wednesday has its own literal *in-your-face* manner over our earthly life's fate that no other day can quite match. Except, we proclaim a

crucified, yes, but also, Risen Christ, right? We are an Easter people, correct? We know death is not meant to have the final everlasting sting. There's a bit of Gospel that happens on a cross entrenched on Calvary, for sure, but a rather holy eternal-altering something else ensues out of a tomb as well. So yes, Ash Wednesday, in the grand scheme of our walk with a both crucified and Risen Lord, is...complicated.

Then, this year's Ash Wednesday? Talk about complicated. Talk about what's happened since last Ash Wednesday, when a virus seemed to be someone else's problem to deal with, but not us. Talk about ever since then, and it feels like we're walking through a dusty filth of death tolls and hatred hurled with vengeance and our local, state, national and world levels of humanity descending into a chaos that we wish we could wipe off and get rid of just as easily as washing away a dusty oily cross from our forehead after a worship on any Ash Wednesday before. Do we really need this Ash Wednesday *this* year of all years? Haven't we been reminded of our human condition with its mortal reality nearly every single day since last Ash Wednesday? Do we really need a dusty oily cross to seemingly add an unnecessary insult to our spiritual and mental injury through these recent months?

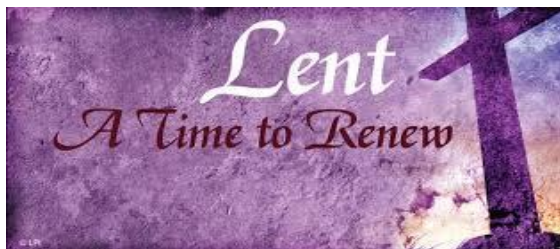
Except, I don't think the cross is meant to do that: not the cross of Good Friday, not the cross marked on us at baptism, not the one signed when we hear and see the relentless forgiveness of our sins at the beginning of our Sabbath worship, not the one when we are further blessed at the end of that same worship to send us forth with joy over the Great News just proclaimed, and not even the one etched with crumbled-up dust on our forehead. Yes, to dust we shall return at some point. We accept that as part of our human story. But, we know we will not go down alone. Our Lord insists on joining us all our days, including that one, whenever it comes. And still to this day, God has a way of shaping some rather awe-inspiring beauty from the dust of it all.

There's gotta be more to it, though, including *this* year of all years. The Gospel isn't just about taking care of us in our personal dust. The Gospel is about setting us free from that fear and worry and all the soul-filled complications with that impending death: that we may be so bold and so filled with a most audacious hope that we can walk out with a dusty oily cross on our forehead, knowing that we will die, knowing there will be pain and anguish and complications galore in this life; but we will insist on living.

We will insist on bringing the same love that took on sin and death in our crucified and Risen Lord to life here and now. We will insist on staring down death on Ash Wednesday, trudge through not just a 40-day Lent journey, but a 2020 h---ish nightmare, and tightly cling to the joy that everlasting life doesn't start with our mortal end, but started from our beginning; because Christ already made it so. We will insist that even in the dust of our life and in our nation and in our world, there is still the most transcendent beauty that can never be fully covered. It so happens we do need an Ash Wednesday this year, so that we may be reminded just how powerful this Gospel is now as it ever has been before and ever will be. Thanks be to God, indeed!

In Christ,  
Pastor Brad

*Image: The Living Church*



Although, as you will read below, we plan to return to in-person worship beginning with Sunday mornings at 9am through the month of February, we invite you to continue joining us through virtual means as we worship with our siblings in Christ of the Lutheran Church of the Master for our midweek Lenten gatherings, including for Ash Wednesday.

Beginning with Ash Wednesday, we will provide an email with a PDF attachment of the bulletin for worship, as well as a link to our YouTube video, so that our two church families may still worship together, even at a distance. For the following midweek Wednesday worships, we will provide two videos: one that will include prayer, a reading from Scripture, and a brief homily; the other will be Holden Evening Prayer, as we have sung together in recent years. We will provide a PDF of Holden Evening Prayer that you may use to sing along from home, or you may pick up a paper copy in the sanctuary, if you come for worship on Sunday mornings.

We know this is not ideal, as we often look forward to precious time together with our siblings in Christ at Church of the Master, but we also know we should continue to do our best in minimizing larger gatherings for the sake of everyone involved. We still look forward to this opportunity for us to take on this Lenten journey together, regardless of the circumstances.



2/2 Aubree McPherson

2/4 Nel Lanese

2/8 Katlyn Knerem

2/11 Kenneth Schuetz

2/23 Jody Bernardo

2/23 Michelle Garnett

2/23 Harrison Werner

2/25 Bryan Gaglione

2/27 Jen Garberich

2/28 Deborah Dickey



2/14 Jacquelyn & William Blogna  
Happy 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!



Cuyahoga County has not extended its Stay-at-Home Advisory beyond January 31<sup>st</sup>, we will begin to offer in-person worship starting Sunday, February 7 (9am).

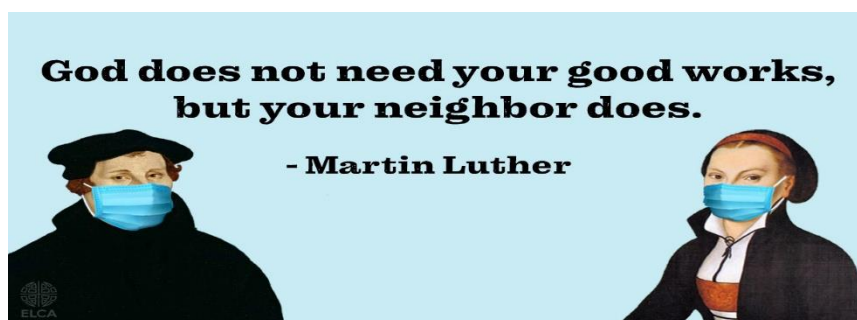
However, we will continue with the same protocols that we put in place before (see below), knowing that even for those of us who have received the full vaccination, we

can still transmit the virus to others. We will always do our best to provide the safest worship environment so that we may whole-heartedly worship God together, yes, but also to take care of our Covenant family and beyond. We also know that not everyone will be comfortable returning to in-person worship, and so YouTube recordings of worship, as well as PDFs of the bulletin and sermon will continue to be provided under the "News" tab of our website ([covenantmaplehts.org](http://covenantmaplehts.org)). Regardless of where you are on the Sabbath, you will always be a treasured part of the Covenant family! Continue to be well, dear church!

Since we will be celebrating Ash Wednesday virtually, ashes will be available to be picked up at the church, whether that be before or after worship on a Sunday, or during office hours. There will be a time during the Ash Wednesday recorded worship where you may place the ashes in the sign of a cross on one another or on yourself. You may also use the prayer/blessing that will be given with the ashes to do so at a separate time.



Saturday Evening services will resume soon, and we will be sure to let you know through Wednesday's Word and other email communications. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause!







As much as we look forward to returning to what was our physical worship home, in a sense, for so long, we also know worship will still not be the same for a while. We will continue to do our part in providing the safest environment possible as the vaccines continue to be rolled out, and that risks still remain. We want everyone who worships with us to feel safe, so that they may focus on worshipping God with their whole heart. With that in mind, here is what to expect in the meantime (of course, all plans are subject to change, and we will do our best to inform you of any changes as soon as possible, through email, our website, Facebook page, and through our call-in Covenant Groups):

- You will be asked to wear a mask the entire time you are in the church building (unless you have a health condition that prevents you from doing so).
- Worship will be made shorter with the lack of air flow in the sanctuary during the winter months.
- Bulletins and individual Communion elements in plastic cups will be available for you to pick up as you enter the back of the sanctuary.
- An offering basket will also be in the back of the sanctuary for you to drop your offerings into, as there will not be a time during worship for offering plates to be passed around.
- Blue X's have been placed in front of the pews to mark where we encourage you to sit to maintain physical distancing from those who are not of your household/family. Each spot also has hand sanitizer bottles on that respective pew.
- We will not be singing together as a congregation, as more published scientific studies reveal the harm with the potential spreading of aerosols/droplets.
- Also, for the bold print in the bulletin, we ask you speak in a whisper voice as opposed to speaking loudly as a group for the prayers of intercession responses, the Lord's Prayer, etc.
- There will not be a processional or recessional of the cross, as well as no receiving line after worship with Pastor Brad. He will continue the monthly calling check-in's, but if you have anything you wish to discuss, please do not hesitate to contact him.

We understand this may still seem extreme, but we will always err on the side of caution for our Covenant family's health and safety, including your individual family and friends whom you may come in contact with during the week. We greatly appreciate your patience and understanding as we take on this unique journey together with God's help to be sure. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact our Covenant council members.

## ***Lent: Reflect, Repent and Connect***

Lent is a time of introspection, and even penance, as we look forward with humble awe and deep gratitude to the celebration of Jesus' resurrection.

The modern practices of Lent have ancient pedigrees. The term "Lent" comes from the Old English word *lencten*, which referred to the "lengthening" of the daylight hours during spring. Christians in northwestern Europe and the British Isles appropriated this term for the spring liturgical season.

Lent was traditionally a time for preparing both longtime believers and new converts for the welcoming of new Christians into the community through their baptisms, which were celebrated during Eastertide. Lent continues to be a time of preparation of self and the community as we look forward to the expansion of God's reign and the defeat of sin and death.

Lenten practices traditionally fall into three broad categories: justice toward God, justice toward oneself and justice toward others. Lent is a time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving to meet these goals.

The following activities can help mark this important season:

### **Justice toward God**

- Rededicate yourself to living into your holy vocation to extend God's reign in your daily life.
- Meditate on God's faithful and sacrificial love for us to cultivate deep and abiding gratitude.

### **Justice toward oneself**

- Remember in humility that you are created of dust and to dust you shall return.
- Take time to honestly, critically and gently evaluate how you have loved God and neighbor—or not—and how the Spirit might be calling you to do better.
- Fast from rich and delicious food to help yourself consciously break patterns of selfishness and overconsumption.
- Repent of patterns and habits that harm yourself and/or others.

### **Justice toward others**

- Continue the traditional Lenten practice of increased giving to people experiencing poverty.

- Commit your time, energy and resources to supporting social justice causes through such organizations and programs as the Lutheran World Federation and the ELCA Good Gifts project.
- Invite acquaintances (or strangers!) to share a meal and share their stories.
- Take steps toward reconnecting with those from whom you've been estranged (if healthy for all).

One of my favorite practices during Lent is a modification of the Jewish ritual *Tashlikh*. A person will go to their closest flowing water source, such as a stream or river. I like to survey the path my local Mud Creek takes on its way to the Gulf of Mexico, which helps me remember my responsibility to be a good custodian of local waterways. Then I recite, among other prayers, Micah 7:18-19:

***Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency.***

***He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot.***

***You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.***

Lint (for Lent!) taken out of one's pocket—or perhaps a tiny bit of bread or a handful of soil—is cast into the stream or river to be carried away to the sea. The water carrying away the tiny bits of lint that accumulate in my pocket helps me visualize how God takes away my sins and injurious habits that also accumulate over time, so that I'm freed to serve God and neighbor once again.

On Thursdays during Lent, I try to discern patterns that harm myself or my neighbor, and when I come up with something of which I would like to repent, I take from my pocket or wallet a tiny bit of cotton or linen lint (something that will biodegrade quickly and not harm fish or amphibians). On Good Friday, I toss the small collection of natural fibers into the creek, repenting and thanking God for carrying away my sins.

However one practices Lent, it's a time of introspection and preparing to celebrate Jesus' taking away of our sins, sinfulness and embrace of death over life. It's important that we don't wallow in self-contempt. Rather, with confidence in Jesus' salvation, we should repent of negative patterns and live into Jesus' calling to love God and our neighbors. Lent continues to be a time of preparation of self and the community as we look forward to the expansion of God's reign and the defeat of sin and death.

*Originally published February 28, 2020 at [LivingLutheran.org](http://LivingLutheran.org).*

*Cory Driver is a minister of word and service, and the director of the Transformational Leadership Academy in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. He earned his doctorate in Jewish religious cultures from Emory University, Atlanta. Cory lives with his family in Indianapolis.*

# *The Lutheran Church of the Covenant*

## February 2021

Sunday Servers	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5	6
AG: Joan Garvin, Marie Zahn, Jen Garberich	7 9:00 am Fifth Sunday after Epiphany	8	9 7:00 Council Meeting in Parlor	10	11	12	13-
AG: Claudia Senderak, Jean Rusher, Gwen Susaneck	14 9:00 am Transfiguration of Our Lord	15	16 1:30 pm Worship & Music	17 Ash Wednesday with YouTube video	18	19	20-
AG: Claudia Senderak, Jean Rusher, Gwen Susaneck	21 9:00 am First Sunday in Lent	22	23	24 Midweek Lent with YouTube video	25	26	27-
AG: Sheila Werner, Annie Copeland, Paula Hohenstein	28 9:00 am Second Sunday in Lent	March 1	March 2	March 3 Midweek Lent with YouTube video	March 4	March 5	March 6



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The Lutheran Church of the Covenant  
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