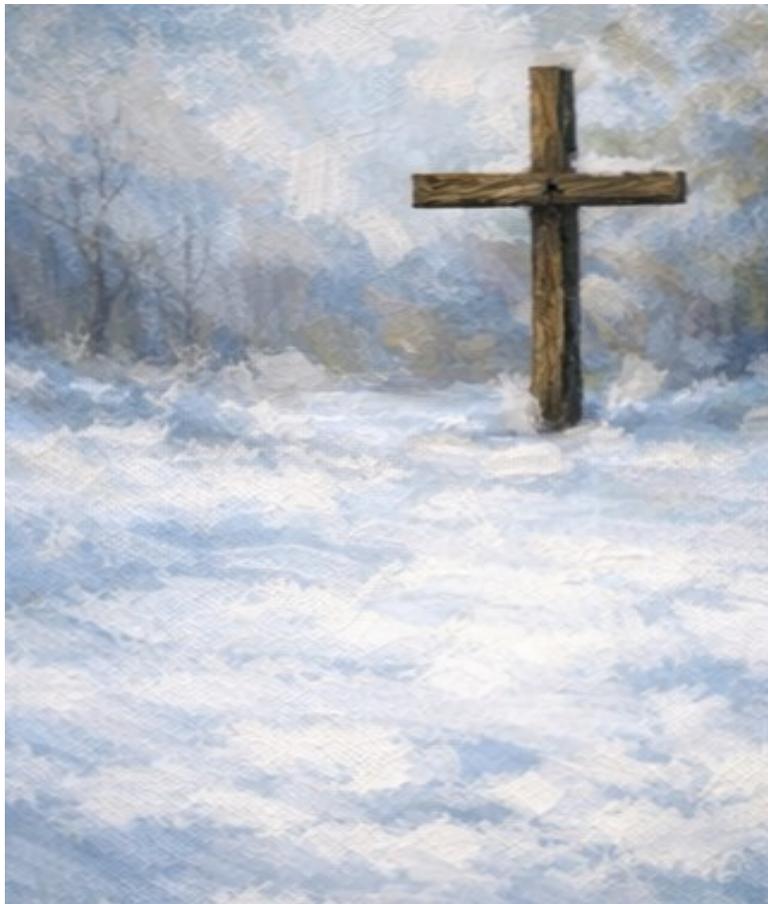


In the Bleak:
An Ash Wednesday Service



**Lutheran Church of the Master
Lutheran Church of the Covenant
February 18, 2026 7:00pm - joint service**

Ash Wednesday is a solemn day of prayer that begins the season of Lent. During the forty days of Lent, we are called to reflection and repentance as we wait for Easter resurrection. On this day we confess our sins and receive the sign of ashes as a tangible marker of our mortality, our grief over sin, our humility before God, and our hope in the cross.

During the next forty days, we will not look away from what is hard. We will name the bleakness that exists: cold ground, heavy burdens, and uncertain futures. But we will also remember a truth: that seeds buried in winter darkness are not dead. They are waiting. During Lent we will water what God has planted in us with prayers, honesty, justice, and faith. We will tend the Lenten season faithfully, trusting that what is buried in the bleak will rise.

Today we also join with the family of believers in celebrating Holy Communion. We believe that Christ is present in this meal, and when we receive it, we receive God's grace, abundant love, and forgiveness. Everyone is invited to share communion regardless of age, denomination, or background. Those who do not wish to commune may come forward for a blessing. Ashes and communion will be brought to those who need to remain seated in worship. Gluten-free wafers and grape juice are also available, please let the pastor or assistant know if you need these.

During portions of the service marked with an asterisk () you are invited to stand as you are able/comfortable. Congregational responses are in **bold** type. An offering basket is at the rear of the sanctuary.*



Greeting

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Ash Wednesday Proclamation

God is with us at all times. In brutal winters, in political chaos, in health struggles, in the uncertainty about the future.

The bleak certainly exists.

The prophets name it: systems of injustice that crush people.
The psalmists confess it: our own broken hearts, our honest mess.
The epistles list it: afflictions, hardships, calamities, sleepless nights.
Jesus acknowledges it: this world, where we fast and pray and still ache.

The bleak is not a failure of faith.

It is where God meets us here and now.

Not with false promises that everything is fine. Not with spiritual platitudes that skip over the pain. But with presence. With ashes that say: you are dust, you are limited, you are mortal—and you are beloved. With bread and wine that say: I am with you, especially in this.

Tonight we begin Lent—forty days in the bleak, trusting that the God who created light from darkness, who raised Jesus from death, who breathes life into the driest bones, walks with us still.

*Opening Song: When We Are Tested



1 When we are test - ed and wres - tle a - lone,
 2 When in the des - ert we cry for re - lief,
 3 When we are tempt - ed to bar - ter our souls,
 4 When we have strug - gled and searched through the night,



fam - ished for bread when the world of - fers stone,
 plead - ing for paths marked by cer - tain be - lief,
 trad - ing the truth for the pow'r to con - trol,
 sort - ing and sift - ing the wrong from the right,



nour - ish us, God, by your word and your way,
 lift us to love you be - yond sign and test,
 teach us to wor - ship and praise on - ly you,
 Sav - ior, sur - round us with cir - cles of care,



food that sus - tains us by night and by day.
 trust - ing your pres - ence, our on - ly true rest.
 seek - ing your will in the work that we do.
 an - gels of heal - ing, of hope, and of prayer.

Text: Ruth Duck, b. 1947

Music: SLANE, Irish traditional

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***Prayer of the Day**

God of our salvation, we long to be reconciled to you. Help us to clear away any obstacle that prevents us from accepting the grace of Christ. No matter what we face in this life, increase in us knowledge and patience, kindness and holiness of spirit, genuine love and truthful speech, so that, by the power of God at work in us, we may live even as we are dying and rejoice even in our sorrows. Though it may seem that we have nothing, if we are reconciled to you, we possess everything, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Isaiah 58:1-12

Shout out; do not hold back!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!

Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.

Yet day after day they seek me

and delight to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness

and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;

they ask of me righteous judgments;

they want God on their side.

“Why do we fast, but you do not see?

Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day

and oppress all your workers.

You fast only to quarrel and to fight

and to strike with a wicked fist.

Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.
Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, "Here I am."

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,

then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
The Lord will guide you continually
and satisfy your needs in parched places
and make your bones strong,
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water
whose waters never fail.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

Word of God, Word of Life. **Thanks be to God.**

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10

We entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As we work together with him, we entreat you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says,

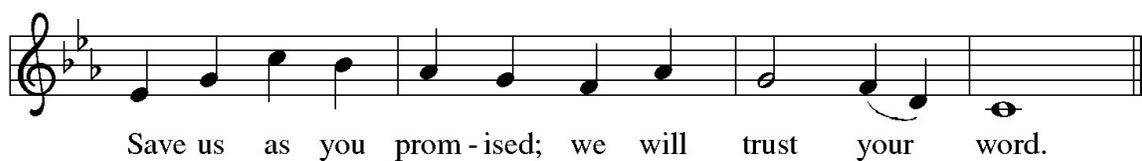
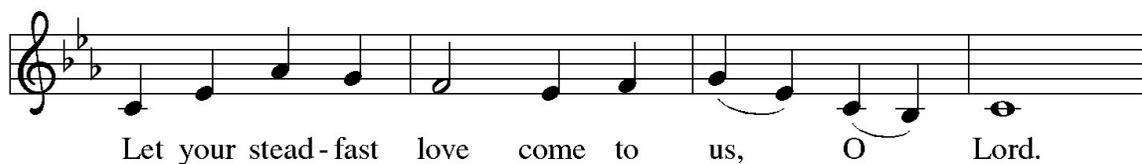
“At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation!
We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: in great endurance, afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; in purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genu-

ine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors and yet are true, as unknown and yet are well known, as dying and look—we are alive, as punished and yet not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing everything.

The Word of the Lord, planted in us. **Thanks be to God.**

*Gospel Acclamation



*Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

The holy gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

[Jesus said to the disciples:] “Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

“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. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

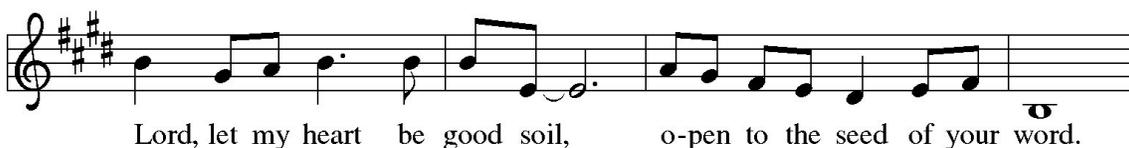
“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And whenever you fast, do not look somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so 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.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

*Meditation Hymn: Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil



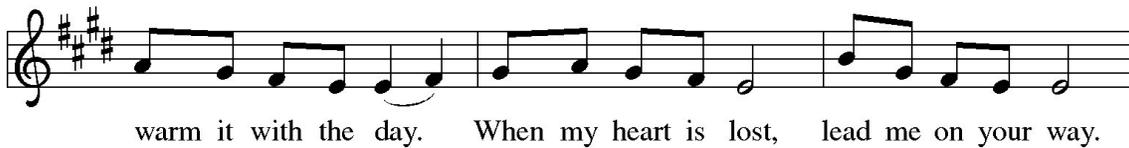
Lord, let my heart be good soil, o-pen to the seed of your word.



Lord, let my heart be good soil, where love can grow and peace is un-der-stood.



When my heart is hard, break the stone a - way. When my heart is cold,



warm it with the day. When my heart is lost, lead me on your way.



Lord, let my heart, Lord, let my heart, Lord, let my heart be good soil.

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Meditation

Invitation to Lent

Friends in Christ, today with the whole church we enter into a time of remembering Jesus' passover from death to life, and our life in Christ is renewed. We begin this holy season in the bleak, 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.

And yet, beneath the frozen ground, the seed is already planted. God has not abandoned us but meets us in the honest truth of where we are.

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 into 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 embark on our journey through these forty days to the great three days of Jesus' death and resurrection trusting that what is buried will rise!

Confession of Sin

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

Most holy and merciful God,

We confess to you and one another and before the whole company of heaven that we have sinned by our fault, our own most grievous fault, in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart, 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 negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to share the
faith that is in us, we confess to you. Our neglect of human need
and suffering, our indifference to injustice and cruelty, we confess
to you.**

Have mercy on us, O God.

**Our false judgments, and our prejudice and contempt toward those
who differ from us, we confess to you. 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, your mercy is great.

Imposition of Ashes

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 by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ we are given eternal life.

Amen.

All are invited to come forward by the center aisle to place your cards at the foot of the cross and receive the sign of the cross in ashes upon your forehead. Please return by the outer aisle.

Psalm 51 is read during the imposition of ashes.

***Prayer after Ashes**

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 Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, keep us in eternal life. **Amen.**

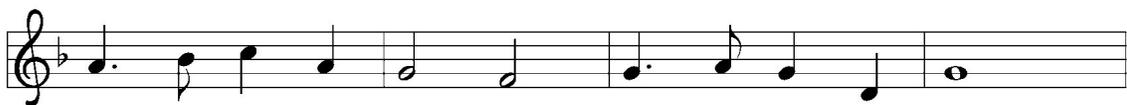
***Sharing of the Peace**

The peace of the Lord be with you. **And also with you.**



*Offertory Song: In the Bleak Midwinter

Please stand as the offering is brought forward



1 In the bleak mid - win - ter, frost - y wind made moan,
2 Heav - en can - not hold him, nor . . . earth sus - tain;
3 What . . . can I give him, poor . . . as I am?



earth stood hard as i - ron, wa - ter like a stone;
heav'n and earth shall flee a - way when he comes to reign;
If I were a shep - herd I would bring a lamb;



snow had fall - en, snow on snow, snow on snow,
in the bleak mid - win - ter a sta - ble place suf - ficed
if I were a wise . . . man I would do my part;



in the bleak mid - win - ter, long a - go.
the Lord . . . God al - might - y, Je - sus Christ.
yet what I can I give him— give my heart.

*Offering Prayer

Our treasures, O Lord, come from your hand. Out of your goodness toward us we have received so much. Knowing that we came into this life with nothing, and will go out the same way, we give of the time, talents, and resources we have now. Use them, use us, as you will, for your Son's sake. **Amen.**

*Communion Liturgy

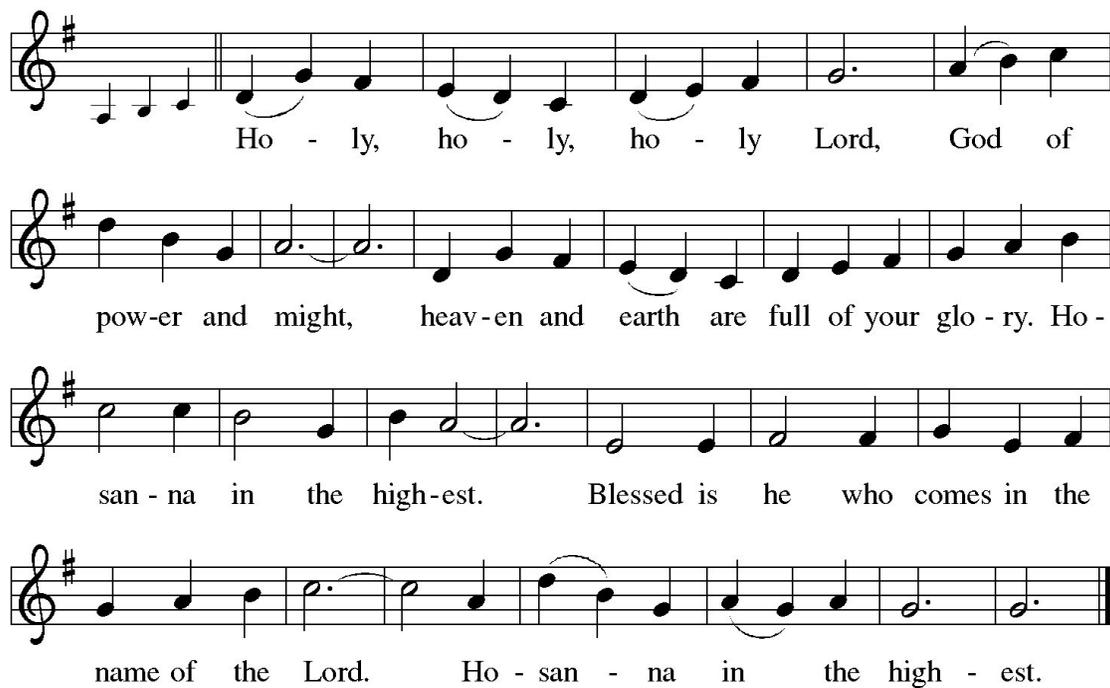
The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Holy One.....even dry bones stand to sing your praise:



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of
pow-er and might, heav-en and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho -
san - na in the high-est. Blessed is he who comes in the
name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

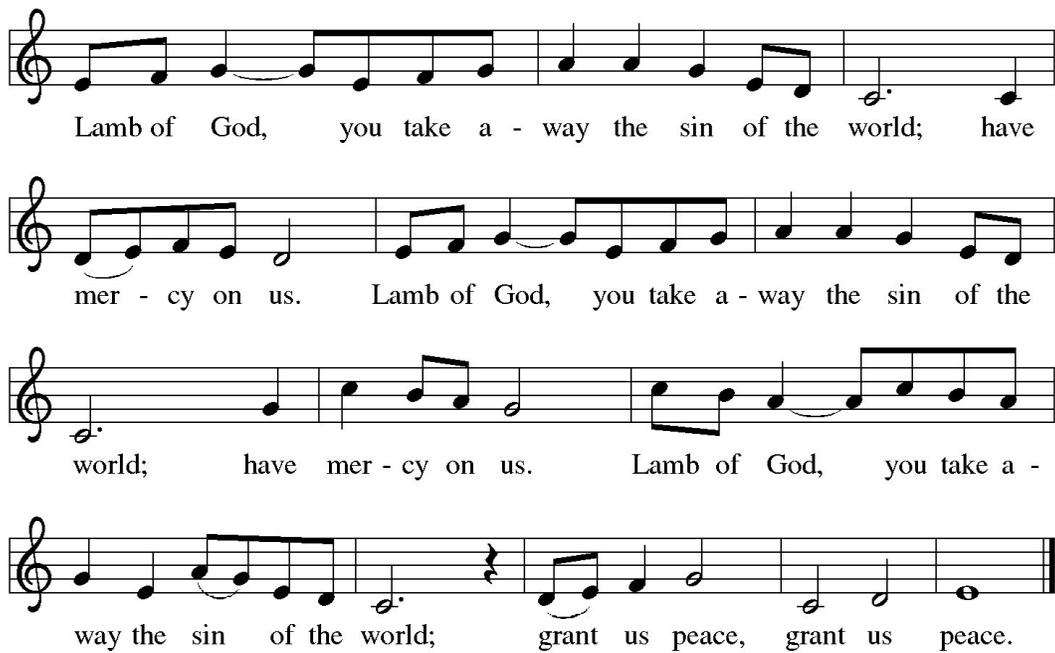
We give you thanks and praise.....all glory is yours, almighty God,
now and always. **Amen.**

*The Lord's Prayer

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.

Invitation to Communion

All are welcome to come forward. If you would like communion brought to you, remain in your seat and the elements will be brought to you there.



Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world; have
mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the
world; have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a -
way the sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

***Post-Communion Prayer**

Holy God, you have fed us at your table in the middle of the bleak. We have received the bread and the cup, your presence planted in us like a seed in winter ground. Send us now into these forty days nourished, honest, and unafraid. We trust that what you have planted shall rise, through our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

***Blessing**

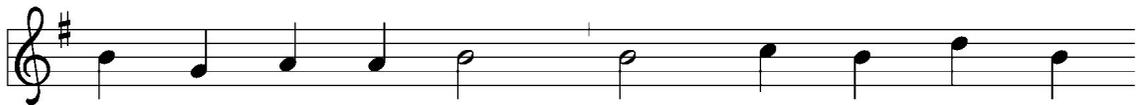
Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. Let the ashes you wear be the ashes of transformation in the mercy of God. Go now, marked and beloved and never alone, planted in the image of the One who is was and ever more shall be: Creator, Christ and Spirit, One God, now and forever. **Amen.**



*Sending Hymn: The Glory of These Forty Days



1 The glo - ry of these for - ty days we cel - e -
2 A - lone and fast - ing Mo - ses saw the lov - ing
3 So Dan - iel trained his mys - tic sight, de - liv - ered
4 Then grant, O God, that we may, too, re - turn in



brate with songs of praise; for Christ, through whom all
God who gave the law; and to E - li - jah,
from the li - ons' might; and John, the Bride - groom's
fast and prayer to you. Our spir - its strength-en



things were made, him - self has fast - ed and has prayed.
fast - ing, came the steeds and char - i - ots of flame.
friend, be - came the her - ald of Mes - si - ah's name.
with your grace, and give us joy to see your face.

Text: Latin hymn, 11th cent.; tr. Maurice F. Bell, 1862–1947, alt.
Music: ERHALT UNS, HERR, J. Klug, *Geistliche Lieder*, 1543
Outside USA: Text from *The English Hymnal*, © Oxford University Press 1906, All rights reserved.

*Dismissal

Created by dust and held together by God's love, go now in peace,
reconciled to God and to one another. **Thanks be to God.**

All depart in silence.

Serving in Worship this Evening

Assisting Minister: Ted Lockmiller

Reader: Barb Gaglione

Reader: Betty Schuette

Reader Psalm 51: Judy Detman

Crucifer: Adrain Bernardo

Usher: Jen Lasher-Dobush

Organist: Gerry Mass

Presiding Minister Rev. Andrea McDonough

