



Johnsville United Methodist Church

Union Bridge, MD

Our mission is to nurture the members of the congregation in developing a personal relationship with God and to share His word and His love with the larger community.

PRAISE, WORSHIP AND CELEBRATION

February 17, 2021

Ash Wednesday

GOD'S PEOPLE GATHER

WELCOME

PRELUDE

"Just As I Am" (Bradbury)

OPENING HYMN

"Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days"

UMH 269

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|---|---|
| 1. Lord, who throughout these forty days
for us didst fast and pray,
teach us with thee to mourn our sins
and close by thee to stay. | 2. As thou with Satan didst contend,
and didst the victory win,
O give us strength in thee to fight,
In thee to conquer sin. |
| 3. As thou didst hunger bear, and thirst,
so teach us, gracious Lord,
to die to self, and chiefly live
by thy most holy word. | 4. And through these days of penitence,
and through thy passiontide,
yea, evermore in life and death,
Jesus, with us abide. |
| 5. Abide with us, that so,
this life of suffering over past,
an Easter of unending joy
we may attain at last. | |

CALL TO WORSHIP

(Joel 2)

Leader: Blow the trumpet in Zion. Sound the alarm on God's holy mountain!

People: **The day of the Lord draws near—a day of a darkness and gloom.**

Leader: Yet even now, who knows if God will relent, and turn our calamity into joy.

People: **Let us rend our hearts, not our clothing, and return to the Lord, who abounds in steadfast love.**

Leader: Let us forsake the ways that lead to death, and return to God with all our hearts!

People: **Have mercy on us, O God, and save us from our iniquities.**

OPENING PRAYER

(Joel 2)

God of dust and ash, you fashioned us from the dust of the earth, and to dust we shall return. May the ashes placed upon our foreheads this day remind us of who we are, and whose we are. Draw us back to you, O God, for you are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Heal the hardness of our hearts, that we may be faithful disciples of the one who makes all things new. Amen.

Prayers from The Abingdon Worship Annual 2009, pp.38-40.

HYMN

"Sunday's Palm Are Wednesday's Ashes"

TFWS 2138

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| 1. Sunday's palms are Wednesday's ashes
as another Lent begins;
thus we kneel before our Maker
in contrition for our sins.
We have marred baptismal pledges,
in rebellion gone astray;
now, returning, seek forgiveness;
grant us pardon, God, this day! | 2. We have failed to love our neighbors,
their offences to forgive,
have not listened to their troubles,
Nor have cared just how they live,
we are jealous, proud, impatient,
loving overmuch our things;
may the yielding of our failings
Be our Lenten offerings. |
| 3. We are hasty
to judge others,
blind to proof of human need;
and our lack of understanding
demonstrates our inner greed;
we have wasted earth's resources;
want and suffering we've ignored;
come and cleanse us, then restore us;
make new hearts within us, Lord! | |

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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. Amen.**

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

EPISTLE LESSON: 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; 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.

⁶As 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.

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

‘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.

Leader: The Word of God for the people of God.

People: Thanks be to God.

SERMON

What is Ash Wednesday All About?

Rev. Shari McCourt

Today is Ash Wednesday which begins the season of Lent. It is during this celebration in which the church makes the bold announcement that makes us cringe by saying, “You are all going to die and your body will decay! You are powerless to prevent it! The finest medical technology in the world will not change the fact that the death will come to all of us.” Our time is limited. We need to focus on living a life worth living like we have not done in the past.

So what is Lent all about anyway? We say that it is a period of 40 days modeled after Jesus 40 days in the desert, but the real time is 46 days. We don’t count Sundays because they are considered mini Easters. Lent starts today and goes until Holy Saturday.

The History of Lent

The Lenten season was developed as part of the historical Christian calendar. Although its format has varied throughout the centuries and throughout different cultures, the basic concept remains the same. It is to open our hearts to God's refining grace through prayer, confession, fasting, and almsgiving as we anticipate Holy Week. This is the practice of spiritual disciplines.

We began the readings with the prophet, Joel blowing his trumpet sounding the announcement that day of the Lord is coming! Joel reminds us to return to the Lord by practicing spiritual disciplines that will bring us back to our creator God.

Joel describes our God as, “gracious, and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.” This description of God is not one of a harsh punishing God, but of one who loves God’s creation, and desires to be the saving agent for us all!

Our Epistle reading further explains God as the saving agent of humanity. “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. 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!” Now **is** the day of salvation! It is the time to reconcile with our God before it is too late.

One of the practices of this celebration in the imposition of ashes is to remind us of the bold proclamation from the prophets that we are here came from ash and dust and we will return to ash and dust. By repenting of our sin and being reconciled to our God we avoid remaining an ash. It is through the power of the cross and resurrection that we will have new life through our savior Jesus the Christ.

During the forty days of Lent the church encourages us to practice spiritual disciplines that will help us to live lives in a state of preparedness for the day that the Lord comes again. Practicing spiritual disciplines are a way of keeping us spiritually fit.

The gospel text from Matthew consists of instructions to the faith community on how to perform these disciplines. The interesting thing about this text is that there is no command to do these things. Instead it is assumed that the disciples will continue these fundamental elements of Jewish practice as a part of their lives. So the instruction in this passage is how to practice these fundamental elements of the faith in a way that is for one's own personal benefit, **not** for the **attention** of others. The basics are fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. During this season you are invited to practice examples of the spiritual disciplines.

As I close I am called to share from a devotional that I read this morning called "Freedom From the Past", it comes from Renaissances Unity.

"Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, is so-called from the ceremonial of ashes.

Ashes symbolize repentance.

John the Baptist came, saying, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Repentance means denial; it is a relinquishment and should be made without too much vehemence.

Therefore, I deny out of consciousness old error thoughts, as if I were gently sweeping away cobwebs, and I affirm positively and fearlessly that I am a child of God, and that my inheritance is from Him." ~Charles Fillmore

Today's Affirmation

I am free from my past errors and know that I am a beloved child of God.

Dear God,

During this Lenten season, I commit myself to reflection and healing.

I let go of my attachment to negativity and fear.

I seek the Truth in all things.

I release the past and any mistakes I have made.

I turn away from who I thought I was and embrace Your vision of who I really am. I open my mind and the light of Your mind illumines me. It is my intention to be—all that I am.

With Your help, I know that I will never be the same.

Thank you Lord! Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

(Psalm 51)

Holy God, wash us thoroughly for our iniquity and cleanse us from our sin. For our transgressions are ever before us, and we have done what is evil in your sight. You desire truth in our inward being, yet we turn our back on the wisdom you would impart in our hearts. Create in us a clean heart, o God, and put a new and right spirit within us. Do not cast us away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from us. Forgive our sins, and lead us in your paths anew, that we might teach transgressors your ways and lead sinners to return you. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

(Joel 2:12-13)

Hear the words of the prophet Joel: "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 God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing."

INVITATION TO THE WORD

Just as the ashes we place upon our foreheads remind us of the frailty of our lives here on earth, and of our needs to live each day to the fullest, may these readings prepare our hearts to face our mistakes and to commit ourselves to leading more godly lives.

CALL TO PRAYER

(Matthew 6)

God, who dwells in secret, hears the prayers of our hearts and the yearnings of our spirit. Let us enter into silent prayer to the One who sees in secret and rewards the humble of heart. Amen.

RESPONDING IN FAITH

OFFERING OF OUR GIFTS & TITHES

Many thanks for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of the church.

As an act of worship, please consider keeping current in your tithes and offerings. Even though the church building is closed, we still have financial obligations we need to meet. The mailbox will be checked daily. The address is: Johnsville United Methodist Church, 11106 Green Valley Road, Union Bridge, MD 21791

DEDICATION OF OUR GIFTS WITH DOXOLOGY

DOXOLOGY

"Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow"

UMH 95

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
praise him, all creatures here below;
praise him above, ye heavenly host;
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.

*Offering Prayer

All things come from you, O God, and with praise and thanksgiving we return to you what is yours. You created all that is, and with love formed us in your image.

When our love failed, your love remained steadfast.

**You gave your only Son Jesus Christ to be our Savior,
that we might have abundant and eternal life.**

All that we are, and all that we have, is a trust from you.

**And so, in gratitude for all that you have done,
we offer ourselves, and all that we have,
in union with Christ's offering for us.**

**By your Holy Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"What Wondrous Love Is This"

UMH 292

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| 1. What wondrous love is this,
O my soul, O my soul,
what wondrous love is this,
O my soul!
What wondrous love is this
that caused the Lord of bliss
to bear the dreadful curse
for my soul, for my soul,
to bear the dreadful curse
for my soul. | 2. What wondrous love is this,
O my soul, O my soul,
what wondrous love is this,
O my soul!
What wondrous love is this
that caused the Lord of life
to lay aside his crown
for my soul, for my soul,
to lay aside his crown
For my soul. |
| 3. To God and to the Lamb
I will sing, I will sing,
to God and to the Lamb,
I will sing;
to God and to the Lamb
who is the great I AM,
while millions join the theme
I will sing, I will sing;
while millions join the theme
I will sing. | 4. And when from death I'm free,
I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
and when from death I'm free,
I'll sing on,
And when from death I'm free,
I'll sing and joyful be,
and through eternity
I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
and through eternity
I'll sing on. |

BENEDICTION

As we go forth let us live as though today might be our last day, seeking God's will for our lives in all that we do. Our challenge is to spend a little extra time in prayer each day throughout these forty days.

POSTLUDE

"Freely, Freely" (Owens)