



[Photo by Cristian Grigore:](#)

Prelude

Call To Worship¹

Leader 1: We enter the season of Lent – the season when we explore God’s amazing love for us.

All: Let us love God with our hearts, souls, minds and strength.

Leader 2: All around us are people who need love – lonely, crabby, hurting, hoping people.

All: Let us love our neighbors with a true depth of Spirit.

Leader 1: Often the last person we send a Valentine to is ourselves.

All: Yet God loves us without reservation and calls us to self-love as well as compassion for others.

Leader 2: Now I love only in part

All: then I will love fully, even as I have been fully loved.

¹ Inspired by Maren Tirabassi’s “Transfiguration prayer and Ash Wednesday liturgy ... Valentine’s Day, really?,” Gifts in Open Hands Blog, posted February 1, 2016, <https://giftsinopenhands.wordpress.com/2016/02/01/transfiguration-prayer-and-ash-wednesday-liturgy/> (accessed January 25, 2024).

HYMN: Be Thou My Vision from the Pilgrim Hymnal

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; Nought be all else to me save that thou art. Thou my best thought, by day or by night, Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word; I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord; Thou my great Father, I thy true son; Thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise, Thou mine inheritance, now and always; Thou and thou only, first in my heart, High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, my victory won, May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun! Heart of my own heart, whatever be-fall, Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21, p. 787

“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.

“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 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. 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.

RESPONSE: #820 Threefold Amen (Danish)

Reflection on the Scripture:

Imposition of Ashes

At the imposition, the person administering the ashes says, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Those receiving the ashes can be silent, or say “**Amen**” or “**Lord have mercy.**”

Prayer of Thanksgiving:²

**Dust-writer,
who shapes the letters of forgiveness
before the challenge to begin again,
you guide us through
our own dust and ashes,
avoiding the stones of condemnation.**

**Give us hope for this Ash Wednesday
and the Lenten days to come,
and turn our cinder-lives into embers.
Amen.**

Let us recite the Lord’s Prayer together:

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

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**thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.
Amen.**

HYMN: #445 *Just As I Am, Without One Plea*

Just as I am, without one plea but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou bidd'st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come! I
come!

Just as I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot, to
thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I
come! I come!

Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a
doubt, fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come!
I come!

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind, sight, riches, healing of the
mind, yea, all I need in thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come! I
come!

Just as I am, thou wilt receive, wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse,
relieve; because thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come! I
come!

A Prayer of Confession to Send us Back Out into the World

Leader 1: O God, we confess the damage we may do our
bodies by those things we eat or do not eat, drink or do
not drink, by over-sleeping or sleep-deprivation, by
failure to exercise or failure to seek medical attention,
by life-destroying emotions and angers.

All: Forgive us, O God, and make us whole.

Leader 2: O God, we confess that we love ourselves too
much or too little, ignore our families or smother them,
fail to love our neighbors or fail to recognize that
everyone is a neighbor.

All: Forgive us, O God, and teach us love.

Leader 1: O God, we confess our sins of hesitation – when
kindness should be done, generosity or common
decency shown, or risky justice pursued.

All: Forgive us, O God, and wake us up.

Leader 2: God, we confess our spoken sins – gossip or lies, betrayal of trust or exaggeration, hurtful criticism, prejudiced jokes, cheap agreements without commitment.

All: Forgive us, O God, and keep us quiet.

Leader 1: God, we confess the harm we do when we don't think we will be caught.

All: Forgive us, O God, and brighten the mirror of our conscience.

Leader 2: O God, we confess our joylessness – not noticing the beauty of the earth or the sweet passing of time, staying aloof from people and animals, letting distractions eat our living.

All: Forgive, O God, every time we do not open our spirits, our minds, our emotional hearts, or our bodies to the blessings you are waiting to give us.

Assurance of Grace: Hymn: #502 *Amazing Grace*

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was, blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved; how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures; he will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come; 'tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun.

Ash Wednesday Household Prayer: Morning³

Lord Jesus, help me be your disciple today. If I receive rebuke from anyone, let me suffer it with grace. If I receive commendation, let me accept it without vanity. Strengthen my hope in the treasure that endures, that I may know with you the joy of heaven. Amen.

Ash Wednesday Household Prayer: Evening

O God, my heart has been stained with the sin of this world; my spirit is weary and my joy has grown dim. With the psalmist I pray: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Amen.

Ash Wednesday Questions for Reflection

In today's Gospel reading from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his disciples to do acts of piety in secret (Matt. 6:1–6, 16–21). However, in an earlier part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs his disciples, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). How do you manage this paradox in your life?

Notes on This Evening's Worship Service

Participants

Reverend Catherine A. Merrill	Minister
Reverend Veronica Walsh Don	Minister
Jocelyn Jones	Musician

In her book, *The Liturgical Year*, Joan Chittister helps frame the meaning of Lent as we make this annual journey which begins tonight on Ash Wednesday

Each succeeding year, Lent calls each of us to renew our ongoing commitment to the implications of the Resurrection in our own

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lives, here and now. But that demands both the healing of the soul and the honing of the soul, both penance and faith, both a purging of what is superfluous in our lives and the heightening, the intensifying, of what is meaningful.

Lent gives the lie to isolation. We are not alone. We walk with the church through the world on this journey to renewal. We walk, too, with the One who has gone before us to bring us home again.

[Lent] is about our rising to the full stature of human reflection and, as a result, accepting the challenge to become fully alive, fully human rather than simply grossly, abysmally, self-centeredly human.