

Ash Wednesday Service

This is a contemplative worship service with worship stations. The focus of this service is prayer and practice. Participants will have opportunities to lift up prayer through a variety of means, as well as participate in Lenten spiritual practices. One suggestion is to form a Lenten prayer team of trusted people who can pray the prayer concerns lifted up on Ash Wednesday throughout the season of Lent.

Preparation: Worship Stations

You will need to set up four worship stations in your worship space, that people can move freely to during the service, having the Communion Table and ashes in a central location. Make sure your stations are accessible to people of all abilities. The idea is that one can participate in all or just one of the various worship stations. You may want to have chairs in a circle, or place chairs and cushions sporadically throughout the worship space to make it warm and inviting for people to sit comfortably. While the temptation is to have Ash Wednesday be as dark as possible, the reality is this is the beginning of a season of introspection, reflection, and repentance. If you dim the lighting, you will want to make sure the lighting around the prayer stations is sufficient for people to participate.

Station One: Candles—have tea lights or tapers that people can light easily as a way of lifting up a prayer or vow. One idea is to have several votives and large candles already lit, with smaller votives, tapers or tea lights available to light safely, to lift up prayers.

Station Two: Journaling/Writing—have several pieces of paper with pens and pencils, and a closed box that people can place their prayers to be prayed by the leaders and/or prayer team; another option is to have a prayer journal available that individuals can write their prayers in (it may be seen as less private, but folks can be encouraged to write anonymously and then turn the page to leave it blank for the next person.

Station Three: Devotional—have different Scripture verses printed and allow participants to take a Scripture and read silently in their seats, meditating on the words. Have a devotional guide with scriptures printed separately that they can take home with them to pray for Lent.

Station Four: Practice—place cards with different Spiritual practices printed on them, inviting participants to choose a practice for the season of Lent to participate in. Some practices include vows such as giving up something for Lent or fasting, others include taking on a new spiritual practice, such as acts of charity, meditation, prayer walks, praying for each continent, volunteering time, etc.

Central Station: Anointing with Ashes and Communion—participants are invited to come to the central station at any time to partake in the elements of Communion and receive the imposition of ashes.

Prelude Music

Welcome and Call to Worship

We are gathered here to commemorate Ash Wednesday, as we begin the season of Lent, this is a time to remember that from the dust of the earth, the ashes of stars long burnt out, we were created, and to the earth we return. The palms of praise that greeted Jesus as he arrived in Jerusalem turned into the reeds of beating and bruising, and last year's palms of celebration are this year's dust and ashes. Our faith journey rises and falls with each season, as we experience our own times of paradise and pain, wellsprings full and wilderness deserts. On Ash Wednesday, we recognize our own season of wandering from God, where we feel distant, aloof. God desires to draw us back into God's embrace. In this time of Lent, we reflect on our faith journey, we repent of our own sins, what we have done to separate us from others and from God, and we seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God and others. We seek healing and hope. We seek renewal of our faith life. Just as spring is waiting deep in the ground beneath us, so we know that what seems lost will be found, and will be restored.

Come, join in this service of contemplation and reflection as we prepare for Lent. You will be invited to find your own way of experiencing Lent this evening in our prayer stations and reflections. Come, follow the One who went into the wilderness, and was tempted, and the angels waited on him.

Song: (Chalice Hymnal #180) Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days

Prayer of Invocation

We have gathered here, loving God, to mark the season of Lent, to begin that journey to the cross. We have gathered here to repent of our sins publically and privately. We have gathered here to be in the presence of one another, where we can draw strength, knowing that wherever two or three of us are gathered, You are present among us. Guide us throughout these forty days as we journey deeper into Your embrace, and as we journey to the cross, let us put to death those things that separate us from each other and from you. May we know Your presence is always with us, the power of Your transformative love is within us, and may we know Your grace surrounds us and is beyond us. In the name of Jesus, our companion on this journey of faith, we pray. Amen.

Song: (Chalice Hymnal #211) Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley

Prayer of Confession (unison):

We bring our burdens and our sins to You, O Christ, who bears the heavy load for us. We place upon You our excuses, our shortcomings, our anger and our desire, knowing that You can remove these sins from us and restore us to life. We confess that we have gone astray. We confess that we have not loved You fully and have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. We confess that we have not fully loved even our very selves. Forgive us of our sins. Help us to turn back to You. Restore what has been broken, transform what has been twisted, find what has been lost, so we may be the living, loving image of You in creation. In Your precious name we pray. Amen.

Song: (Chalice Hymnal #427) Loving Lord, as Now We Gather

Scripture: Matthew 16:24-28

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up the cross and follow me." As we prepare for this season of Lent, we are called to repentance, to deny our own desires and worldly longings and turn to the Cross, putting to death those things that separate us from God. Let us deny ourselves, take up the Cross, and follow Christ.

Time of Reflection, Contemplation, Communion and Prayer

Words of Institution for the Lord's Supper

(Invite those gathered to participate in the different worship stations during this time. You may choose to have music softly playing in the background)

Imposition of the Ashes

(while at any time during the time of reflection people may come forward, take communion and receive the imposition of ashes, share these words as a way of closing out the time)

“From the dust you were taken, and from the dust you return” (from Genesis 3:19b). **We were created in the image of God, but we have distorted that image with our sin and the sinful ways of the world. We need repentance and renewal. For out of ashes, out of the earth, shall spring forth new life, so to the earth of our creation and to God our Creator, we must return. Repent, knowing that your sins are forgiven, and that new life awaits in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

Litany of Pardon and Renewal:

Leader: Jesus has born our burdens.

People: We have been relieved of what once weighed us down.

Leader: Jesus has forgiven our sins.

People: Jesus has restored our relationship with God and with each other.

Leader: Jesus has called us to turn back to God.

People: Jesus has transformed our hearts to love one another.

Leader: Jesus has given us New Life.

People: This is the promise of new life now, and we live into the hope of resurrection.

Leader: There is no place we can be lost, no darkness without light, no death without life.

People: Jesus has made all things new again.

Leader: Let us go forth into the world, sharing the Good News of Jesus, renewed for the Lenten Journey.

People: Let us prepare for the coming spring, the promise of new life and the hope of salvation found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

All: Amen.

Closing Song: (Chalice Hymnal #447) Thuma Mina (Send Me, Jesus)

Benediction