

THE WORSHIP OF GOD
MARCH 1, 2017
ASH WEDNESDAY
7:00 PM

GATHERING: *In silence and meditation*

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERVICES

Brothers and Sisters, we are called here tonight to prepare our hearts and lives for the days ahead. These days are called the period of Lent. Lent is the time of year where we as Christ followers take stock of our lives and actions. It is a time when we take note of the sin or missteps we have taken in following Christ. This is the time that we prepare by repenting of our past and beginning a new life as follows of Christ for our world and for our day.

GREETING (Responsive)

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love.

**According to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.**

Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin....

**Surely you desire truth within me;
you teach me wisdom which comes from my
heart.**

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean.
Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow....

**Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.**

OPENING PRAYER (Unison)

Let us pray together:

**Our hearts are laid bare before you, Lord. You see us
as no one else does. O God, we come to worship you
not with empty words and meaningless acts of piety,
but with lonely, aching spirits. We long for the days of
joy and gladness that we have known with you. Fold
back the darkness that surrounds us. Show us your
mercy. Cover us with your grace. We return our**

**whole hearts to you this day, as we pray humbly
together in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

FIRST LESSON: *Joel 2:1-2, 12-17a*

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near — a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come. 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 he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S CALL (Responsive)

Cry, and God will answer.

Call, and the Lord will say: "I am here."

If you do away with yoke, the clenched fist, the wicked word; if you give your bread to the hungry, and relief to the oppressed;

Call, and the Lord will say: "I am here."

Your light will rise in the darkness and your shadows become like noon. The Lord will always guide you, giving you relief in desert places.

**Cry, and God will answer. Call, and the Lord will say:
"I am here."**

ANTHEM: *What Wondrous Love Is This*

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.

"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."

MEDITATION: Rev. Con Sauls

THE CONFESSION OF GOD'S PEOPLE (Responsive)

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love:

**According to your abundant mercy blot out my
transgressions.**

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight, so that you, O God, are justified in your sentence and blameless in your judgment.

Behold, I was born into iniquity, and I have been sinful since my mother conceived me.

Behold, you desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow;

Make me hear with joy and gladness; let the bones which you have broken rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities.

INVITATION TO THE OBSERVANCE OF LENTEN DISCIPLINE

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Christians have always observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection. It became the custom of the church to prepare for Easter by a season of penitence, fasting, and prayer. This season of forty days provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for baptism into the body of Christ. It is also the time when persons who had committed serious sins and had been separated from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the church. The whole congregation is thus reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our baptismal faith.

I invite you, in the name of the Lord, to observe a holy Lent, by self-examination, penitence, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving; and by reading and meditating on the Word of God. So that we might begin right, by marking our mortality, and drawing nearer to the God who calls us.

THANKSGIVING OVER THE ASHES

Almighty God, You have created us out of the dust of the earth; Grant that these ashes may be to us a sign of our

mortality and penitence, So that we may remember that only by your gracious gift may we find forgiveness and healing. May these ashes remind us of the desire and commitment we make to you this night.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

Come forward at the direction of the usher.

Please kneel at the altar rail as you are able.

RECONCILIATION AND COMMENDATION

May the almighty and merciful God, who desires not the death of a sinner but, who desires that we turn from wickedness and live, accept your repentance, forgive your sins, and restore you by the Holy Spirit to the newness of life offered us through Jesus Christ.

PASSING THE PEACE

Now let us stand and offer those near us the forgiveness and peace we seek from God to each other.

As you greet each other offer these words:

"The grace of God and the forgiveness of Christ be with you."

*HYMN 269 (1, 2, 5): *Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days*

*DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING (Responsive)

The Lord takes no pleasure in our earthly offerings, but delights in the sacrifice of our broken spirits. God will never turn away a wounded heart.

We go as repentant people seeking less of us and more of God within our daily lives.

Go into the world by God's Grace and Christ's Redemptive Power.

*(Items in **BOLD** are unison)*

**Please stand as you are able.*

LITURGISTS

Rev. Scott Wilks

First United Methodist Church

Rev. Col Sauls

Mountain City Presbyterian Church

