



Growing in God's word ~ Living in Spiritual unity ~ Sharing faith in Christ

WELCOME!

This evening you've chosen to worship with us and we thank you for doing so. Whether family, friend, or guest, it's our hope that you will feel welcome in this place as we worship our God through Jesus Christ together.



Ash Wednesday
February 17, 2010

“...Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love...” – Joel 2:13

Ash Wednesday
February 17, 2010 - United Church of Ovid

Gathering Us In

Welcome and **Call to Worship¹

Reader: Rend your hearts.

People: We return to the Lord.

Reader: The Lord, our God, is gracious and merciful.

People: We return to the Lord.

Reader: The Lord, our God, is slow to anger.

People: We return to the Lord.

Reader: The Lord, our God, is abounding in steadfast love.

People: We return to the Lord.

Reader: The Lord, our God, will relent his punishment if we just ask.

People: We return to the Lord.

Reader: As we rend our hearts, may we return to the Lord.

People: Amen

****Song of Praise** “Ancient Words”²

Holy words...long preserved...for our walk...in this world,
They resound...with God's own heart...O, let the Ancient words impart.
Words of life...words of hope...give us strength...help us cope
In this world...where e'er we roam...Ancient words will guide us home.

Ancient words...ever true...changing me...and changing you.
We have come...with open hearts...O let the ancient words impart.

Holy words...of our faith...handed down...to this age.
Came to us...through sacrifice...O heed the faithful words of Christ.
Holy words...long preserved...for our walk...in this world.
They resound...with God's own heart...O let the ancient words impart.

Ancient words...ever true...changing me...and changing you.
We have come...with open hearts...O let the ancient words impart...
O let the ancient words impart.

¹ adapted from Joel 2:13

² MPW149-CCLI#703014 ©2001 Integrity's Hosanna! Music) - Jeremiah 23:9 - Hebrews 4:12

Song of Preparation

“I Surrender All”

UMH#354

From the Scriptures: (A time of silent reflection will follow each reading.)

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

Reader 1: This is the word of God for the people of God.

People: Thanks be to God!

Psalm - Psalm 51:1-17

Reader 1: This is the word of God for the people of God.

People: Thanks be to God!

Prophet - Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Reader 1: This is the word of God for the people of God.

People: Thanks be to God!

Letter – 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Reader 1: This is the word of God for the people of God.

People: Thanks be to God!

Message

“Return To Me”

**** Affirmation of Faith**

“The Apostle’s Creed”

UMH #882

Invitation to Observe Lent

Prayer of Thanksgiving over the Ashes

Confession

Placing of the Ashes “Breathe on Me Breath of God”

UMH #420

****Assurance**

“Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed”

UMH #359

****Blessing and Sending Us Out Music**

Questions and Answers about Ash Wednesday

Q: What is Ash Wednesday?

A: Ash Wednesday is the day Lent begins. Its official name is the Day of Ashes. It is called Ash Wednesday because, being forty days before Good Friday, it always falls on a Wednesday and it is called Ash Wednesday because on that day at church the faithful have their foreheads marked with ashes in the shape of a cross.

Q: Is Ash Wednesday based on a pagan festival?

A: No. Ash Wednesday originated in the A.D. 900s as a way to prepare for the joy of Easter, long after Europe had been Christianized and the pagan cults were stamped out.

Q: Is it Biblical to have foreheads marked with a cross?

A: In the Bible the mark on the forehead is a symbol of a person's ownership. By having their foreheads marked with the sign of a cross, this symbolizes that the person belongs to Jesus Christ, who died on a Cross. (see I Samuel 4:12, 2 Samuel 1:20, 13:19, 15:32, Ezekiel 9:4-6, Romans 6:3-18, Revelation 7:3, 9:4, 14:1)

While it is not required, it is to be strongly encouraged as it is a fitting and visible spiritual reminder that encourages one to adopt an attitude of prayer, repentance, and humility. As James said: "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James 4:10). If you feel uncomfortable, however, the ashes can be placed on the back of a person's hand as well.

Q: Why is the signing done with the ashes significant?

A: Because ashes are a biblical symbol of mourning and penance. In Bible times the custom was to fast, wear sackcloth, sit in dust and ashes, and put dust and ashes on one's head. While we no longer normally wear sackcloth or sit in dust and ashes, the customs of fasting and putting ashes on one's forehead as a sign of mourning and penance have survived to this day. These are two of the key distinctive of Lent. In fact, Ash Wednesday is a day not only for putting ashes on one's head, but also a day of fasting (see below).

They also symbolize death and so remind us of our mortality. Thus when the leader uses his thumb to sign one of the faithful with the ashes, he says, "Remember, man, that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return," which is modeled after God's address to Adam (Genesis 3:19; cf. Job 34:15, Psalms 90:3, 104:29, Ecclesiastes 3:20).

This also echoes the words at a burial, "Ashes to ashes; dust to dust," which is based on God's words to Adam in Genesis 3 and Abraham's confession, "I am nothing but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27). It is thus a reminder of our mortality and our need to repent before this life is over and we face our Judge.

Q: Where do the ashes used on Ash Wednesday come from?

A: They are made by burning palm fronds which have been saved from the previous year's Palm Sunday, they are then blessed by a priest -- blessed ashes having been used in God's rituals since the time of Moses (Numbers 19:9-10, 17).

Q: Why are ashes from the previous year's Palm Sunday used?

A: Because Palm Sunday was when the people rejoiced at Jesus' triumphal entrance to Jerusalem. They celebrated his arrival by waving palm fronds, little realizing that he was coming to die for their sins. By using palms from Palm Sunday, it is a reminder that we must not only rejoice of Jesus' coming but also regret the fact that our sins made it necessary for him to die for us in order to save us from hell.

Q: Is Ash Wednesday a holy day like Sunday?

A: No, but it is strongly advisable since it is fitting to mark the beginning of the season of Lent. The formal, corporate worship of God is a good way to get a good start any season.

Q: What is the season of Lent and why is it important?

A: The word "lent" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word "lencturn" which means "spring." This season is a time of preparation for celebrating Easter. Historically, Lent was used as a time of preparation for new Christians who were then baptized on Easter weekend. Over time, the season has become a time to remember and ask forgiveness for our sin and to forgive the sins of others in order to come with a clean heart before the Resurrected Christ on Easter morning. The Revised Common Lectionary uses these four Scripture passages each year to mark the start of the Lenten season: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 / Psalm 51:1-17 / 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10 / Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21.³

*Holy God, through the discipline of these forty days,
make your Spirit's cleansing fire burn within us.
Lift us from the dying embers of our inattention.
Mark us with the sign of your holy passion.
Make us ready to respond to the call of Jesus Christ. Amen.*⁴

³ Total article adapted from "Ash Wednesday" Copyright (c) 1996 by James Akin. All Rights Reserved.

⁴ Chalice Worship, pg. 109 (Christian Church-Disciples of Christ)