



Wednesday, February 17, 2021
Black History Month
Ash Wednesday
Order of Service

Gathering Song..... **“Sweet, Sweet Spirit”** (Hymnal, #334)
(being sung this morning by Doris Akers)

There’s a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place, and I know that it’s the spirit of the Lord; There are sweet expressions on each face, and I know they feel the presence of the Lord. Sweet holy Spirt, sweet heavenly Dove, stay right here with us filling us with your love; and for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise; without a doubt we’ll know that we have been revived when we shall leave this place.

Greeting/Call to Worship..... **Cynthia**

Leader: O, God, when we pause to look back at our lives on this Ash Wednesday, we realize that we have been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Ms. Cynthia: We have neglected to do good when it was in our power to do so.

Leader: We, like believers of old, have pulled down your altars and erected idols crafted in our own image. We have turned our backs on the poor, choosing instead to criminalize poverty.

Ms. Cynthia: We have ignored the cries of the motherless, the fatherless, the widow and the widower choosing instead to turn children and the elderly into the new poor.

Leader: We have bankrupted the country with our greed and consumed more than our share of the world’s riches. We have not dealt honorably with our enemies or our friends, and we have manufactured a place in the company of the righteous.

Ms. Cynthia: Forgive us, O God, for turning sackcloth and ashes into a fashion statement by pursuing form without substance.

Leader: Forgive us, O God, for the times we have neglected to provide our children and our world an authentic example of Christianity.

Ms. Cynthia: As we begin the journey of these 40 days. Wash us, O God and we shall be clean. Cleanse us, O Lord, and we shall be made whole. Amen.

Opening Hymn
“The Old Rugged Cross” *(featuring Marion Williams)*

Evening Prayer..... **Pat**

The Lord's Prayer (song by Andrea Bocelli)

Call to Confession **Cynthia**

God knows our false piety and religious pretense. All that we say and do is known to God. We can hide nothing from our Creator. Now is the time to bare our souls before God.

Scripture Reading #1 **Gemma**

Psalm 51:1-17

51 Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love! Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great compassion! ² Wash me completely clean of my guilt; purify me from my sin! ³ Because I know my wrongdoings, my sin is always right in front of me. ⁴ I've sinned against you—you alone. I've committed evil in your sight. That's why you are justified when you render your verdict, completely correct when you issue your judgment. ⁵ Yes, I was born in guilt, in sin, from the moment my mother conceived me. ⁶ And yes, you want truth in the most hidden places; you teach me wisdom in the most secret space.

⁷ Purify me with hyssop and I will be clean; wash me and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and celebration again; let the bones you crushed rejoice once more. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins; wipe away all my guilty deeds! ¹⁰ Create a clean heart for me, God; put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me! ¹¹ Please don't throw me out of your presence; please don't take your holy spirit away from me. ¹² Return the joy of your salvation to me and sustain me with a willing spirit. ¹³ Then I will teach wrongdoers your ways, and sinners will come back to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from violence, God, God of my salvation, so that my tongue can sing of your righteousness. ¹⁵ Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will proclaim your praise. ¹⁶ You don't want sacrifices. If I gave an entirely burned offering, you wouldn't be pleased. ¹⁷ A broken spirit is my sacrifice, God. You won't despise a heart, God, that is broken and crushed.

Scripture Reading #2 **Ms. Cynthia**

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Announcement of Alarm and Peril

2 Blow the horn in Zion; give a shout on my holy mountain! Let all the people of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is near—² a day of darkness and no light, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread out upon the mountains, a great and powerful army comes, unlike any that has ever come before them, or will come after them in centuries ahead.

Change your hearts

¹² Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your hearts, with fasting, with weeping, and with sorrow; ¹³ tear your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, very patient, full of faithful love, and ready to forgive. ¹⁴ Who knows whether he will have a change of heart and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? ¹⁵ Blow the horn in Zion; demand a fast; request a special assembly. ¹⁶ Gather the people; prepare a holy meeting; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the groom leave his room and the bride her chamber.

¹⁷ Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the LORD's ministers, weep. Let them say, "Have mercy, LORD, on your people, and don't make your inheritance a disgrace, an example of failure among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

Showy Religion

6 "Be careful that you don't practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

²"Whenever you give to the poor, don't blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. ³But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing ⁴so that you may give to the poor in secret. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

Showy Prayer

⁵"When you pray, don't be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. ⁶But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

Showy Fasting

¹⁶"And when you fast, don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They distort their faces so people will know they are fasting. I assure you that they have their reward. ¹⁷When you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. ¹⁸Then you won't look like you are fasting to people, but only to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Earthly and Heavenly Treasures

¹⁹"Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. ²⁰Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don't eat them and where thieves don't break in and steal them. ²¹Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Hymn

"Give Me A Clean Heart" (Rev. Milton Brunson & The Thompson Community Singers)

Message Rev. Eugene W. Matthews

"Clean But Not Clean Enough"

Invitation to the Observance of Lenten Discipline

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: the early Christians observed with great devotion the days of our lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church that before the Easter celebration there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation. During this season converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism.

It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins and had separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to participation in the life of the Church. In this way the whole congregation was reminded of the

mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith. I invite, therefore, in the name of the Church, to observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word. To make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature, let us now kneel before our Creator and Redeemer.

Thanksgiving Over the Ashes

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. Grant that these ashes may be to use a sign of our mortality and penitence, so that we may remember that only by your gracious gift are we given everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Imposition of Ashes – Pastor Matthews

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Hymn

“Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed” (*sing along with Grace Community Church*)

Prayer of Thanksgiving – Erica

O God, maker of everything and judge over all that you have made, from the dust of the earth you have formed us and from the dust of death you would raise us up. By the redemptive power of the cross, create in us a new spirit that we may repent of our sins and lead lives worthy of your calling; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Confession – Ms. Cynthia

God, on this Ash Wednesday, we come before you acknowledging your greatness, exalting your supreme power, declaring that you are the God of our salvation. We come confessing the multitude of our transgressions known and unknown. We're guilty and we need your grace. And so we bow before you, kneel before you; lay down prostrate before you, asking that you would intervene for our sinful, sorrowful, and sick souls. Create in us newness of life, happiness of heart. Restore to us the full blessings of heaven. Deliver us from the penalty we deserve. And we will rise up. We will stand up. We will get up and live up to the expectations of your calling on our lives. These things we pray in the powerful and mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness – Gemma

Hear the Good News. The LORD, our God, is gracious and merciful; slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. God hears the earnest cries of the repentant and forgives our sins. Happy are those who accept God's forgiveness!

Hymn

Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross (*featuring the Mississippi Mass Choir*)

Dismissal With Blessing

Pastor: Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are repentant.

Cynthia: **Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, while we, humbly lament of our sins and acknowledge our wretchedness, we may obtain of you, the God of all**

mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Pastor: Holy God, whose Spirit drives us into the wilderness to confront our priorities with a holy fast; grant that as we are about to do battle with our demons and the power of evil, we may be defended by our grace through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Closing Selection



*We entreat you
on behalf of Christ,
be reconciled to God.*

2 Corinthians 5:20, NRSV