Ash Wednesday  
The Beginning of Lent  
February 22, 2023  
7:00 pm

Prelude  
Sunday's Palms are Wednesday's Ashes  
by Rae E. Whitney

Lighting the Christ Candle

Words of Welcome  
Rev. Susan Tindall

Opening Words  
Rev. Beth Freese Dammers

One: We gather together at the edge of a new season.  
All: We stand together on the cusp of something new.

One: Will we wade into self-reflection?  
All: Will we invite honesty to dance?

One: Will we listen for God’s invitation?  
All: Will we seek deeper faith?

One: What kind of fast do we choose? What kind of faith will we build?  
All: We gather together at the edge of a new season.

One: Listen, God is speaking.

Call to Confession  
Susan

One: Our scripture passage for today tells the story of people who are trying hard to be faithful. They ask God, “God, do you notice? Do you see all the good we’re doing? Are you proud of us?”

It sounds a bit like children seeking parental attention. Did we do a good job? In those moments we always want to hear God say, “Excellent job, good and faithful servant.” But in today’s scripture, God says to the people, “I want you to seek justice.”
Friends, faith is a constant dance of us asking God, “Am I doing it right?” and, “How can I do better?”

In the prayer of confession we linger in this tension for a moment. We acknowledge that we are works in progress and we ask for God’s help. God may challenge us, but fortunately, God will never abandon us. So let us turn to God in prayer. Let us pray:

Prayer of Confession  
One: Merciful God,  
How many times in a day could we choose love?  
All: **How many times could we choose justice?**  
One: How many times could we speak kindly to ourselves?  
All: **How many times could we offer grace?**  
One: How many times, God? And how often do we miss it?  
All: **Forgive us for choosing the path you did not travel.**  
One: Forgive us for hitching our horse to the world’s measure of goodness, instead of yours.  
All: **Return our hearts to you, and guide us continually, even in the parched places.**  
One: With gratitude we pray, amen.

Words of Forgiveness  
One: Family of faith, when a baby is learning to walk, the parents do not criticize the baby for falling. Instead, they celebrate every wobbly step. They applaud every hesitant stand. They whoop and holler when their child lands in their arms.

Surely the same must be true of God. Although we often lose our way and we often choose the wrong thing, I imagine God whoops and hollers with every step in God’s direction.

So hear and believe the good news of the gospel: no matter how many times we fall, no matter how many times we choose the wrong path, God is waiting for us at the end with open arms. We are forgiven. We are invited. We belong.

All: **Thanks be to God for a love like that. Amen.**

Hymn 435  
*There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy*  
IN BABILONE

Prayer for Inspiration  
Beth

Scripture Reading  
Psalm 51:1-17

Scripture Reading  
Isaiah 58:1-12

Susan

Reflection
Lord, We Have Come at Your Own Invitation

O QUANTA QUALIA

Communion

Invitation to the Table

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

One:  God of light and dust be with you,
All:  And also with you.
One:  Open wide our hearts:
All:  We open them up to our God.
One:  Let us give thanks to God our creator.
All:  Even in the midst of the wilderness, we give God our praise.

(prayer continues)

Breaking the Bread and Pouring the Cup

Communion Music

Let Us Break Bread Together
arr. Cindy Berry

Communion of the People

Prayer After Communion (unison)

Sign Us with Ashes
PHOENIX

Imposition of Ashes

Susan & Beth

Affirmation of Faith

Beth

We believe in a God who chooses freedom,
who unties every rope and carries our burdens.
We believe in a God who ushers in the poor and the hungry, who has a seat saved for all of us.
We believe in a God whose love is like the sun,
who says, “I’m here, I’m here!” every time we cry.
We believe in a God who walks before us in the parched places, who rescues our bones,
who tends to us like a gardener.
And because we believe,
we strive to choose love.
Because we believe,
we strive to pursue justice.
Because we believe...
Amen.

Blessing and Invitation to the Season of Lent

Susan

Postlude

Breath on Me Breath of God
arr. Phillip Keverin

As the postlude is played, leave the service when you feel led. The service will end in silence.
What is Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent with a public act of confession. Acknowledging that we have all sinned and fallen short of God’s glory, we repent and return to our loving Creator. Acutely aware of our failure and frailty, we express our utter reliance on God’s saving grace.

Ash Wednesday developed in the medieval period as a time when penitent sinners were presented for church discipline during the season of Lent, to be reconciled with the community of faith on Maundy Thursday. Ash Wednesday also came to be the occasion for new believers to enroll in the catechumenate, a period of preparation for baptism at Easter. For those who undertake spiritual disciplines, Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten fast.

Ashes are an ancient symbol of repentance, sorrow, and sacrifice. Traditionally, the ashes for this service are made from the palm branches of the previous year; thus the ashes and palms together frame the season of Lent.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Wednesdays in Lent</th>
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<tr>
<td>March 1, March 8, March 15, March 22, and March 29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evening Meditation</td>
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<td>7:00-7:30 pm</td>
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Pause with us on Wednesdays to pray, center, meditate and mark the days of Lent on Zoom and in person in the sanctuary. Communion will be served each week.

Meeting Link: [https://zoom.us/j/99005387629?pwd=a1Yvbkpyb3BDUnpDQopNRjZNN2JUZz09](https://zoom.us/j/99005387629?pwd=a1Yvbkpyb3BDUnpDQopNRjZNN2JUZz09)

Meeting ID: 990 0538 7629
Passcode: 649436