

**ASH WEDNESDAY
THE FIRST DAY OF LENT
ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH**



February 17, 2021

PRELUDE *Savior, When in Dust to Thee* Setting: Sam Eatherton

ADDRESS TO WORSHIPERS

Dear brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, on this day the Church begins a holy season of prayerful and penitential reflection. Our attention is especially directed to the holy sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From ancient times the season of Lent has been kept as a time of special devotion, self-denial, and humble repentance born of a faithful heart that dwells confidently on His Word and draws from it life and hope. Let us pray that our dear Father in heaven, for the sake of His beloved Son and in the power of His Holy Spirit, might richly bless this Lententide for us so that we may come to Easter with glad hearts and keep the feast in sincerity and truth.

ENTRANCE HYMN #419 *Savior, When in Dust to Thee*

- 1 **Savior, when in dust to Thee**
 Low we bow the adoring knee;
 When, repentant, to the skies
 Scarce we lift our weeping eyes;
 O, by all Thy pains and woe
 Suffered once for us below,
 Bending from Thy throne on high,
 Hear our penitential cry!

- 2 **By Thy helpless infant years,**
 By Thy life of want and tears,
 By Thy days of deep distress
 In the savage wilderness,
 By the dread, mysterious hour
 Of the_insulting tempter's pow'r,
 Turn, O turn a fav'ring eye;
 Hear our penitential cry!

- 3 **By Thine hour of dire despair,**
 By Thine agony of prayer,
 By the cross, the nail, the thorn,
 Piercing spear, and torturing scorn,
 By the gloom that veiled the skies
 O'er the dreadful sacrifice,
 Listen to our humble sigh;
 Hear our penitential cry!

4 By Thy deep expiring groan,
By the sad sepulchral stone,
By the vault whose dark abode
Held in vain the rising God,
O, from earth to heav'n restored,
Mighty, reascended Lord,
Bending from Thy throne on high,
Hear our penitential cry!

LITANY

O Lord,
have mercy.

O Christ,
have mercy.

O Lord,
have mercy.

O Christ,
hear us.

God the Father, in heaven,
have mercy.

God the Son, Redeemer of the world,
have mercy.

God the Holy Spirit,
have mercy.

Be gracious to us.
Spare us, good Lord.

Be gracious to us.
Help us, good Lord.

By the mystery of Your holy incarnation;
by Your holy nativity;
by Your baptism, fasting, and temptation;
by Your agony and bloody sweat;
by Your cross and Passion;
by Your precious death and burial;
by Your glorious resurrection and ascension;
and by the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter:
Help us, good Lord.

In all time of our tribulation;
in all time of our prosperity;
in the hour of death;
and in the day of judgment:
Help us, good Lord.

We poor sinners implore You
to hear us, O Lord.

To prosper the preaching of Your Word;
to bless our prayer and meditation;
to strengthen and preserve us in the true faith;
to give heart to our sorrow and strength to our repentance:
We implore You to hear us, good Lord.

To draw all to Yourself;
to bless those who are instructed in the faith;
to watch over and console the poor, the sick, the distressed,
the lonely, the forsaken, the abandoned, and all who stand in
need of our prayers; to give abundant blessing to all works of mercy;
and to have mercy on us all:
We implore You to hear us, good Lord.

To turn our hearts to You;
to turn the hearts of our enemies, persecutors, and
slanderers; and graciously to hear our prayers:
We implore You to hear us, good Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,
we implore You to hear us.

Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the
world,
have mercy.

Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the
world,
have mercy.

Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the
world,
grant us Your peace.

O Christ,
hear us.

O Lord,
have mercy.

O Christ,
have mercy.

O Lord,
have mercy. Amen.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

Normally at this time we would invite people to come forward to receive ashes upon their foreheads as a sign of repentance and acknowledgement of mortality. But because of the current Pandemic we will forego that practice this year. We will do so both for safety reasons and as a sign of unity within our congregation since we cannot all receive them. At this time, we simply say to you: "remember you are dust; and to dust you shall return."

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God, You desire not the death of sinners, but rather that they turn from their wickedness and live. We implore You to have compassion on the frailty of our mortal nature, for we acknowledge that we are dust and to dust we shall return. Mercifully pardon our sins that we may obtain the promises You have laid up for those who are repentant; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

HOLY ABSOLUTION

Accomplish in us, O God, the work of Your salvation,
that we may show forth Your glory in the world.

By the cross and Passion of Your Son, our Lord,
bring us with all Your saints to the joy of His resurrection.

Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

HYMN OF CONFESSION #440

Jesus, I will Ponder Now

- 1 **Jesus, I will ponder now
On Your holy passion;
With Your Spirit me endow
For such meditation.
Grant that I in love and faith
May the image cherish
Of Your suff'ring, pain, and death
That I may not perish.**
- 2 **Make me see Your great distress,
Anguish, and affliction,
Bonds and stripes and wretchedness
And Your crucifixion;
Make me see how scourge and rod,
Spear and nails did wound You,
How for them You died, O God,
Who with thorns had crowned You.**
- 3 **Yet, O Lord, not thus alone
Make me see Your passion,
But its cause to me make known
And its termination.
Ah! I also and my sin
Wrought Your deep affliction;
This indeed the cause has been
Of Your crucifixion.**

- 4 Grant that I Your passion view
 With repentant grieving.
 Let me not bring shame to You
 By unholy living.
 How could I refuse to shun
 Ev'ry sinful pleasure
 Since for me God's only Son
 Suffered without measure?
- 5 If my sins give me alarm
 And my conscience grieve me,
 Let Your cross my fear disarm;
 Peace of conscience give me.
 Help me see forgiveness won
 By Your holy passion.
 If for me He slays His Son,
 God must have compassion!
- 6 Graciously my faith renew;
 Help me bear my crosses,
 Learning humbleness from You,
 Peace mid pain and losses.
 May I give You love for love!
 Hear me, O my Savior,
 That I may in heav'n above
 Sing Your praise forever.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. Almighty and everlasting God,

You despise nothing You have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and contrite hearts that lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness we may receive from You full pardon and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



SERVICE OF THE WORD

FIRST READING

Joel 2:12–19

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD,
 “return to me with all your heart,
 with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
 and rend your hearts and not your garments.”
 Return to the LORD, your God,
 for he is gracious and merciful,
 slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
 and he relents over disaster.

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;
consecrate a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
gather the people.

Consecrate the congregation;
assemble the elders;
gather the children,
even nursing infants.

Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her chamber.

Between the vestibule and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep
and say, "Spare your people, O LORD,
and make not your heritage a reproach,
a byword among the nations.
Why should they say among the peoples,
'Where is their God?'"

Then the LORD became jealous for his land
and had pity on his people.

The LORD answered and said to his people,
"Behold, I am sending to you
grain, wine, and oil,
and you will be satisfied;
and I will no more make you
a reproach among the nations."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 51:1-13

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 what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,

and in sin did my mother conceive me.
Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND READING

2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says,

“In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL VERSE #198 from One and All Rejoice O Come, Let Us Fix Our Eyes on Jesus

O come, let us fix our eyes on Je - sus, the
found-er and per - fect - er of our faith, who
for the joy that was set be - fore Him en - dured the
cross, de - spis - ing the shame, and is seat - ed at the
right hand of the throne of God.

GOSPEL READING

Matthew 6:1–6, 16-21

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew the 6th chapter.

Glory to You, O Lord.

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when 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 when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
(ESV)

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ.

SERMON

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen. Dear friends in Christ:

At the end of the Gospel text just read, Jesus reminds us that we live in a dangerous and threatening world. It is a world where “moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.”

Jesus’ description reminds us that the world’s threats come from both the forces of nature and from our fellow man. Think about how apparent this is in our own day. The Coronavirus has been a threat from nature unlike any we have faced in a long time. Its record of death and destruction speaks for itself. Likewise, man’s inhumanity to man continues at an unbroken pace. Each day brings new and horrible examples of violence, falsehood, theft and vicious attack.

On Ash Wednesday, the Church brings this sad but clear picture of our world right to our faces. “You are dust,” we are reminded, “and to dust you shall return.” We may be able to avoid the moth, rust and thieves for a while, but not for long. They will find us. And eventually, one or the other will kill us.

It is with this painful truth in mind that our second reading today was chosen. Here we hear an urgent message from Paul to the church at Corinth. “We implore you,” Paul writes to them, “be reconciled to God.”

That reading comes from Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. In his first letter, Paul gave extra effort to help the people be reconciled with one another. He knew about the many divisions that existed between the people, and he addressed them with words of direction and healing.

Now, in his second letter, Paul expresses sorrow that he can’t come and be there with them in person to offer further help. Paul has decided that travelling there would bring them danger. The “afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, and hunger” that he mentions in this text have happened in the past at Corinth, brought about by his message and his presence. These things would likely occur again if he came back. So, he has decided to stay away.

But Paul also wants desperately to encourage them. He knows of the people’s ongoing temptations – to quarrel again for sure, but also to lose hope. He mentions this frequently in the letter.

As an alternative to being there, Paul implores the people as powerfully as he can. And what he tells them above all else, is to be reconciled to God.

The idea of reconciliation is known to us from the realm of human relationships. Reconciliation happens when conflicts are resolved and divisions are healed.

Sometimes we use the word reconciliation to simply mean agreement, as when two sides in a court case come to terms or when two different financial records show the same numbers.

But true reconciliation expresses something beyond just agreement. It also means that a relationship between people has been restored. True reconciliation has to do with love and unity brought about by forgiveness. We speak of reconciliation in a marriage when the relationship is repaired, and not just when the conflict ends.

In the Bible, the word reconciliation is used primarily in connection with relationships between groups of people – especially ethnic groups. It is a common term in Paul’s letters, because Paul spent so much time mediating between the Christians who came from a Jewish background and those whose background was Gentile.

When we hear Paul urging the people to be reconciled to God, we may wonder how this happens. How can one be reconciled to God? After all, we can’t expect God to meet us half-way. God is holy and perfect, and it wouldn’t be right for him to settle for anything less. As for us, we’re not capable of getting even half-way to holiness.

To find an answer to this question, we need only look to the verses immediately prior to our text. There we hear Paul saying: “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself.” Paul then adds: “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.”

As we see in these words, it is God who reconciles. Between people, reconciliation is always a two-way street. But with God it is different. God is the one who takes not only the first step but also the biggest step. God is the one who makes the reconciliation possible.

God did this through a historical event – the sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross. Because of this sacrifice, God does not count our sins against us. And this forgiving of our sins doesn’t just open the way for reconciliation, but also brings it about.

You may recall that the Bible uses the word “atonement” to describe the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins. That word also beautifully describes what the payment for sins does for us. Because of Christ’s actions, we are now “at one” with God. We are in a state of “at-one-ment.” We poor sinners, and Almighty God, have been reconciled.

Since this is the case, how then are we to hear Paul’s appeal to us in today’s text? In other words, if we have already been reconciled, why does Paul still implore us?

Reading on, we soon find our answer. Reconciliation is needed because sometimes we “receive the grace of God in vain.” By this, Paul means that we sometimes receive God’s grace in an empty fashion or without purpose, treating it lightly. We take it for granted. We receive it, but we aren’t changed by it.

God wants us to embody our reconciliation. To live it. Paul expresses this when he adds: “so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

As noted earlier, Paul implores this reconciliation so strongly because he knows we sometimes lose hope. We despair over the continual presence of moth, rust and thieves in our world and in our lives.

But Paul also implores it so strongly because God’s reconciliation gives us the power and the opportunity to extend it to others. “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation,” he says, referring to words from the prophet Isaiah.

“Now” was the time for the Corinthians to be reconciled to God. They faced temptations. They still struggled. And their founding pastor and friend couldn’t be with them. But they had a message that would bring hope and healing. If only they would remember it. And share it.

Now is the time for us to be reconciled to God too.

- 1 Seek where you may
To find a way
That leads to your salvation.
My heart is stilled,
On Christ I build,
He is the one foundation.
His Word is sure,
His works endure;
He overthrows
All evil foes;
Through Him I more than conquer.

- 2 Seek whom you may
To be your stay,
None can redeem his brother.
All helpers failed;
This man prevailed,
The God-man and none other,
Our Servant-King
Of whom we sing.
We're justified
Because He died,
The guilty being guiltless.

- 3 Seek Him alone
Who did atone,
Who did your souls deliver.
O seek Him first,
All you who thirst
For grace that fails you never.
In ev'ry need
Seek Him indeed;
To ev'ry heart
He will impart
His blessings without measure.

- 4 My heart's delight,
My crown most bright,
O Christ, my joy forever.
Not wealth nor pride
Nor fortune's tide
Our bonds of love shall sever.
You are my Lord;
Your precious Word
Shall guide my way
And help me stay
Forever in Your presence.

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee Setting: Max Reger

PRAYERS

Let us pray:

O Lord, our heavenly Father, You do not desire the sinner's death, but rather that we would turn from our sin and live. Turn us again, O God of our salvation, lead us into true repentance, that we may walk in Your ways. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Look graciously on Your Church, and strengthen her proclamation of the Gospel in both word and deed. Renew us in this penitential season to humble ourselves before You, drown our evil thoughts and deeds by Baptismal living, and grow in love and service toward our neighbors. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Look graciously on the families of our congregation. Strengthen parents for their holy lives as they bring up their children in the fear of the Lord. Be with us all in our various vocations and lead us in this holy season to offer our lives to you as incense. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Look graciously on our nation and all who lead, and teach us in this holy Lent to pray for them, to work for the good of all. Be with all medical personnel, especially those caring for covid victims and those who administer vaccinations. Help us all to do what is best for others and forgive us for doing only what pleases us. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Be near to all who are sick, or whose days are weary; be with all expectant mothers, all whose labor is dangerous, the unemployed, those who mourn and those who are near death. Give comfort to us, who are dust and must return to dust. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We thank You, heavenly Father, that You have sent Your only begotten Son into our flesh to offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. Trusting in His mercy, bring us in repentance and faith to Your altar to eat His body and drink His blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Graciously receive our prayers, deliver and preserve us, for to You alone we give all glory, honor and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.

The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.

The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

- 1 **One thing's needful; Lord, this treasure
Teach me highly to regard.
All else, though it first give pleasure,
Is a yoke that presses hard!
Beneath it the heart is still fretting and striving,
No true, lasting happiness ever deriving.
This one thing is needful; all others are vain—
I count all but loss that I Christ may obtain!**

- 3 **Wisdom's highest, noblest treasure,
Jesus, is revealed in You.
Let me find in You my pleasure,
And my wayward will subdue,
Humility there and simplicity reigning,
In paths of true wisdom my steps ever training.
If I learn from Jesus this knowledge divine,
The blessing of heavenly wisdom is mine.**

- 4 **Nothing have I, Christ, to offer,
You alone, my highest good.
Nothing have I, Lord, to proffer
But Your crimson-colored blood.
Your death on the cross has death wholly defeated
And thereby my righteousness fully completed;
Salvation's white raiments I there did obtain,
And in them in glory with You I shall reign.**

- 5 **Therefore You alone, my Savior,
Shall be all in all to me;
Search my heart and my behavior,
Root out all hypocrisy.
Through all my life's pilgrimage, guard and uphold me,
In loving forgiveness, O Jesus, enfold me.
This one thing is needful; all others are vain—
I count all but loss that I Christ may obtain!**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Acknowledgments

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