

ASH WEDNESDAY



**Prayer and Ashes will be available from
7:30 – 9:00 am, Noon – 1:00 pm, and 4:30 – 5:30 pm**

FAITH
LUTHERAN CHURCH

▪ Caring ▪ Sharing ▪ Praying ▪ Growing

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ELCA World Hunger's
40DAYS of Giving

ASH WEDNESDAY MEDITATION:

Practicing Our Piety

Welcome to an Ash Wednesday meditation. Please take a seat, read the following Introduction and the following meditation, and come forward for ashes whenever you are drawn to them.

INTRODUCTION: Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of 40 days of spiritual renewal.

Ashes have deep Biblical roots. In Genesis 3 God says to Adam and Eve: “from dust you came and to dust you shall return.” These words can be heard to say: God created you from the earth’s dust and you will someday return to the earth and to God. During your life cycle you are given the opportunity to follow God’s ways of love, compassion, confession & repentance. We are mindful of that part of our human nature that wants to be God of our life – no help, no dependence.

During Lent we are invited to be mindful of the dark and ego-centric part of our life that leads you to stress, anxiety, burdens, anger, fear, unhealthy dependencies, etc. It is for this dark side that Jesus hung on a cross, so that we might find freedom and forgiveness in God. The ash cross on our forehead connects us to our baptism where we were marked with the cross of Christ forever.

During Lent, starting with Ash Wed., Jesus invites us to practice piety or faithful living. The following scripture selections lead you from what Jesus suggests is the way of life: alms-giving, prayer, and fasting, to a place of transformation, where Isaiah describes how life will be for you when you practice these life-changing disciplines.

The following series of meditations lead you from God’s displeasure and our human condition to how you might practice your piety, and then to transformation.

Benediction: The blessing of God’s eternal love, the courage to follow the way of Christ’s cross, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the broken places of our world be upon you and remain with you forever. Amen

You are also invited to participate in our 5 week Lenten study on Sundays at 11:00 am.

The title is 40 Days of Giving to world hunger.

PRACTICING OUR PIETY, 2016

Jesus' invitation to practice our piety:

Matt 6:1-2, 5 & 7-8, 16

“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. ²“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.

⁵“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.... ⁷“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

¹⁶“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.

Consider/Reflect:

What is the problem here? What are the sins?

What is my sin? Do I do any of these?

The Problem: The Human Condition

Isaiah 58: 1-5

¹⁻³ “Shout! A full-throated shout!
Hold nothing back—a trumpet-blast shout!
Tell my people what’s wrong with their lives,
face my family Jacob with their sins!

They’re busy, busy, busy at worship,
and love studying all about me.
To all appearances they’re a nation of right-living people—
law-abiding, God-honoring.

They ask me, ‘What’s the right thing to do?’
and love having me on their side.

But they also complain,
‘Why do we fast and you don’t look our way?
Why do we humble ourselves and you don’t even notice?’

³⁻⁵ “Well, here’s why:

“The bottom line on your ‘fast days’ is profit.
You drive your employees much too hard.
You fast, but at the same time you bicker and fight.
You fast, but you swing a mean fist.
The kind of fasting you do
won’t get your prayers off the ground.
Do you think this is the kind of fast day I’m after:

a day to show off humility?
To put on a pious long face,
and parade around solemnly in black?

Do you call *that* fasting, a fast day that I, God, would like?”

What is God’s problem with our lives?

Here is What God wants:

1. Fasting:

Isaiah: ⁶⁻⁹ “This is the kind of fast day I’m after:
to break the chains of injustice,
get rid of exploitation in the workplace,
free the oppressed, cancel debts.

What I’m interested in seeing you do is:
sharing your food with the hungry,
inviting the homeless poor into your homes,
putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,
being available to your own families.

⁹ “If you get rid of unfair practices,
quit blaming victims,
quit gossiping about other people’s sins,
If you are generous with the hungry
and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out.

Matthew 6:17 ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ 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.

Consider: I will fast by....

2. ALMS

Matthew 6: 3, 4: ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Consider: What alms might I give this Lent?

3. PRAYER:

Matthew 6: 6: ⁶But 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.

Psalm 51: 10-12;

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

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Consider: For what will I pray this Lent?

What happens to me when I practice piety?

TRANSFORMATION

Isaiah: vs. 8 & 11

Do this and the lights will turn on,
and your lives will turn around at once.
Your righteousness will pave your way.
The God of glory will secure your passage.

Then when you pray, God will answer.
You'll call out for help and I'll say, 'Here I am.'

Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness,
your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.
I will always show you where to go.
I'll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—

Consider: During these 40 days, how will I practice my piety?