



Community Ash Wednesday Worship

March 2, 2022 6:00pm

Covington First Presbyterian Church

Order of Worship

✦ Stand as able

Gathering As God's Beloved People

GATHERING MUSIC

O Lord, Most Holy
O Love that Will Not Let Me Go
Arioso

Cesar Franck
Arr. Caudill and Nelson
J. S. Bach, Arr. Tom and Linda Sprunger

PRELUDE

I Want Jesus to Walk with Me/Let Us Break Bread Together
Becky Ramsey, piano; Alice Walker, organ

Arr. Joel Raney

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Rev. Neeley Rentz Lane

✦ CALL TO WORSHIP

Rev. Lane

"Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart." (Joel 2:12) Roll up your sleeves. Let down your guard. Come in from the storm. Make yourself at home. Pull up to the table. Release the tension in your jaw. Take a deep breath. Return to God with all your heart. May it be so.

✦ OPENING PRAYER

Rev. Lane

✦ HYMN

GRACE

REPENTANCE

2138 Sunday's Palms Are Wednesday's Ashes



1. *Sun-day's palms are Wednes-day's ash - es as an -
2. We have failed to love our neigh - bors, their of -
3. We are hast - y to judge oth - ers, blind to



oth - er Lent be - gins; thus we kneel be - fore our
fenc - es to for - give, have not lis - tened to their
proof of hu - man need; and our lack of un - der -



Mak - er in con - tri - tion for our
trou - bles, nor have cared just how they
stand - ing dem - on - strates our in - ner



sins. We have marred bap - tis - mal pledg - es, in re -
live, we are jeal - ous, proud, im - pa - tient, lov - ing
greed; we have wast - ed earth's re - sourc - es; want and



bel - lion gone a - stray; now, re - turn - ing, seek for -
o - ver - much our things; may the yield - ing of our
suf - fering we've ig - nored; come and cleanse us, then re -



give - ness; grant us par - don, God, this day!
fail - ings be our Len - ten of - fer - ings.
store us; make new hearts with - in us, Lord!

*The first line of the hymn recalls the custom of burning remaining palm leaves of the previous year to form the ashes for this observance.

WORDS: Rae E. Whitney
MUSIC: Attr. to B. F. White

BEACH SPRING
87.87 D

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✦CALL TO CONFESSION

Rev. Gil Gainer

Lent can sometimes get a negative reputation. It's viewed as the season in our faith when we give things up, we prepare for the worst. However, I cannot help but imagine that God wants more for us than just six weeks of discipline or six weeks without chocolate. I cannot help but imagine that God wants a life for us so expansive that faith, joy, and hope flow over the edges. So let us confess, not because we have to suffer our way through Lent, but because the truth moves us one step closer to that expansive faith. Let us pray first silently and then as a collective body of Christ. Broken and Beloved.

✦SILENT CONFESSION

✦PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Rev. Gainer

Holy God, I confess: I don't return to you fully. I share with you the pieces of my life that are convenient. I put on different hats in different rooms. I forget that I am called, invited, and loved with all that I am— including my mess, my beauty, my faith, and my doubt. Forgive me, and give me a heart that longs to return. Friend, God sees you. God hears you. God loves you. You are forgiven and claimed with all that you are. Rest in that good news. Thanks be to God, amen. Holy God, we confess: we don't return to you fully. We share with you the pieces of our lives that are convenient. We put on different hats in different rooms. We forget that we are called, invited, and loved with all that we are— including our mess, our beauty, our faith, and our doubt. Forgive us, and give us hearts that long to return.

✦WORDS OF FORGIVENESS

Rev. Gainer

Friends, God sees you. God hears you. God loves you. You are forgiven and claimed with all that you are. Rest in that good news. Thanks be to God, amen.

✦RESPONSE 166 (Verses 1 & 3) *Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days*

ST. FLAVIAN

***Lord, who throughout these forty days for us did fast and pray,
teach us with you to mourn our sins and close by you to stay.
And through these days of penitence, and through this Passiontide,
yes, evermore, in life and death, or Lord, with us abide.***

BLESSING OF THE DUST by Jan Richardson

Rev. Beverly Casstevens

All those days
you felt like dust,
like dirt,
as if all you had to do
was turn your face
toward the wind
and be scattered
to the four corners
or swept away
by the smallest breath
as insubstantial—

Did you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?

This is the day
we freely say
we are scorched.

This is the hour
we are marked
by what has made it
through the burning.

This is the moment
we ask for the blessing
that lives within
the ancient ashes,

that makes its home
inside the soil of
this sacred earth.

So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.

Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less
than we are

but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,

within the dirt,
within the stuff
of which the world
is made,
and the stars that blaze
in our bones,
and the galaxies that spiral
inside the smudge
we bear.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

Station 1: Rev. Lane Station 2: Rev. Casstevens Station 3: Rev. Gainer

*To receive ashes, please proceed down the center aisle and return to your seat using the outside aisle.
We encourage all to maintain social distancing. You may ask to receive ashes by use of a cotton swab if you wish.*

Proclaiming the Word

ANTHEM

Hope of the World
(Incorporating "Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley")
Kim Perrins, oboe

Lloyd Larson

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Seminarian Alisa Castilla

Loving Creator,
we are here,
telling stories of dust.
We are here,
trying to shake the dust
out of our ears
so that we might hear you clearly.
We are here,
hoping that showing up
is the first step in returning to you.
Scoop us up in your embrace
and carry us to a place of truth.
Clear the smog that makes it hard to see.
Clear the dust that makes it hard to hear.
We are at the edge of our seats.
We are listening for you. Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT READING: Isaiah 58:1-12

Ms. Castilla

GOSPEL READING: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Rev. Dr. McCoy

MESSAGE

Hearts and Treasures

Rev. Dr. Jan McCoy

Responding to the Word

SILENT REFLECTION

Talitha Cumi
Kim Perrins, oboe; Alice Walker, organ

Stephen DeCesare

✦AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Ms. Castilla

**We believe in an expansive love
that healed the sick,
welcomed the children,
and saw this world as it could be.
We believe that that expansive love
runs over the edges of our lives,
smoothing our rough places,
and pulling us home.
We call that expansive love
Yahweh and Mother God,
Jesus and Divine Creator.
Thanks be to God for a
Love like that. Amen.**

LENTEN PRAYER by Walter Brueggeman
Ruler of the Night, Guarantor of the day...

Ms. Castilla

This day — a gift from you.
This day — like none other you have ever given,
or we have ever received.

This Wednesday dazzles us with gift and newness and possibility.

This Wednesday burdens us with the tasks of the day,
for we are already halfway home
halfway back to committees and memos,
halfway back to calls and appointments,
halfway on to next Sunday,
halfway back, half frazzled, half expectant,
half turned toward you, half rather not.

This Wednesday is a long way from Ash Wednesday,
but all our Wednesdays are marked by ashes —
we begin this day with that taste of ash in our mouth:
of failed hope and broken promises,
of forgotten children and frightened women,
we ourselves are ashes to ashes, dust to dust;
we can taste our mortality as we roll the ash around on our tongues.

We are able to ponder our ashness with
some confidence, only because our every Wednesday of ashes
anticipates your Easter victory over that dry, flaky taste of death.

On this Wednesday, we submit our ashen way to you —
you Easter parade of newness.
Before the sun sets, take our Wednesday and Easter us,
Easter us to joy and energy and courage and freedom;
Easter us that we may be fearless for your truth.
Come here and Easter our Wednesday with
mercy and justice and peace and generosity.
We pray as we wait for the Risen One who comes soon.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

COMMUNION

Invitation to the Table

Prayer of Great Thanksgiving and The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Words of Institution

Communion of the People

Church, you are invited to partake with bread and cup upon hearing the words "The Gifts of God for the People of God." We recognize Christ is present with us as the Body of Christ in our sanctuary and in our homes this day. May the Holy Spirit dwell with you as we participate in the sacrament of communion together. One bread, One Body! (instructions for in-person communion are provided for you with your individual communion elements.)

Communion Music

For Everyone Born
Kately Lane, soprano
Verse 1—Choir
Verse 2—Choir and Congregation
Verse 3—Solo; Refrain—All
Verse 4—Choir and Congregation
Verse 5—Choir and Congregation

FOR EVERYONE BORN

Prayer after Communion

Rev. Lane

Holy God, as we leave this space, may we be awestruck by the beauty of the world while holding the pain, the hurt, and tears of your people. May we overflow with love for those around us. May we be effusive with hope and quick to point our joy. And in all our living, and breathing, and being, may we find ourselves full to the brim with God's Holy Spirit, and may it change us for the better. From dust we were created, and dust we shall return. Beautiful, holy, messy, grace-filled dust, we pray. Amen.

Being the Church in the World

✠SENDING HYMN 435

There's A Wideness in God's Mercy

IN BABILONE

✠BENEDICTION

Rev. Dr. McCoy

Please leave in silence

Ashes used in tonight's service come from last year's palms.

For more information about Lenten offerings at First Presbyterian Church, please visit www.fpccov.org/Lent

Worship Music Notes

Sunday's Palms Are Wednesday's Ashes

This hymn by British-born hymn writer Rae E. Whitney (b. 1927) sets the tone for the holy season of Lent. She frames the season in the incipit (the opening line) by reminding us that in the broader tradition of the church, the palms used during the Palm Sunday processional that signals the beginning of Holy Week are saved and burned. The charred palms of the previous season signal the beginning of Lent the next year and are imprinted in the shape of a cross on our forehead as a witness to our faith.

The palms, both in their natural green and charred form, offer a rich symbolism. All living things die. The words spoken at the graveside are a stark reminder of this. "Remember mortal one that you are dust and unto dust you shall return." Befitting the deeper understanding of Lent, ashes are a sign of repentance and mourning. Linking the green palms of Palm Sunday to the charred palms of Ash Wednesday highlights the irony of the coming Holy Week: the week begins with palms waved in celebration of the Messiah and concludes with the Messiah hanging on a cross.

For those that observe this aspect of the Christian Year, the ongoing cyclic nature is pivotal to the experience. Ash Wednesday connects us to the Palm Sunday of the previous year and reminds us of the coming of the next Palm Sunday and the beginning of the next Holy Week. Ash Wednesday places us, the penitent worshipper on our knees, in the center of the drama on the journey to the cross. Rae Whitney captures all of this in the provocative first line of her hymn - the biblical narrative, symbolism of the church, the irony of the green and charred palms, and our role in the drama.

The second line of the opening verse underscores the inherent penitence of the ritual by stating that "we kneel before our Maker" - a posture of obeisance and contrition. The third line ties the receiver of the ashes to their baptismal vows. Those vows included the "Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith":

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love?

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love?

Maintaining these vows is indeed a tall order and it is likely that we have failed to maintain them. This leads us to the last line of the first verse - the petition for pardon.

The remaining two verses focus on a primary offense, our failure to "love your neighbor." These verses form a mini-sermon on our failure to live up to the second of the twin commandments. "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27. At the end of verse two, the hymn writer suggests that the restoration of our relationship with our neighbor should be the focus of our Lenten observance: "may the yielding of our failings [to love our neighbor] be our Lenten offerings.

The final verse delves more deeply into the implications of failure to love our neighbor. This includes our tendency to be "hasty to judge others" and that our action "demonstrates our inner greed." Evidence of our lack of love for our neighbor and our greed is then, in a powerful extension, evident in how "we have wasted earth's resources." The final line of the hymn is a petition, "make new hearts within us, Lord!" - a clear reference to the psalm of the day, Psalm 51, specifically verse 10, "Create in me a pure heart, O God."

One could make the case that Rae Whitney has effectively updated the classic Ash Wednesday hymn, "Lord, who throughout these forty days." This is true, but does not fully capture the poignancy and power of her verse. Claudia Hernaman's classic text is perfectly shaped and captures the meaning of Ash Wednesday and the coming season of Lent. It should continue to be sung. At the same time, its later 19th-century Victorian restraint allows us as 21st-century worshipers the luxury of distancing ourselves from the fuller significance of this season. Whitney's hymn, derived in part from the theological understandings and liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), speaks with a directness from which we cannot escape.

Rae E. Whitney (nee Phillips) was born in Chippenham, Wiltshire, England and received a B.A. from the University of Bristol (1948) and a Certificate of Education (1949). She was a teacher of English and Religious Education (1949-1958). Her earlier faith heritage was Baptist, serving as a lay preacher and Sunday School teacher. She committed to the Church of England in 1956. While visiting Rome, she met Clyde E. Whitney (d. 1992), a rector of an Episcopal parish in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. Following their marriage in 1960, she moved to Nebraska in 1961, where she was a partner in his ministry for three decades serving as a licensed lay reader, chalice bearer, and educator.

Whitney continues to live in Nebraska where she was honored with the event "Hope, Joy, and Wonder: A Festival of Hymns by Rae E. Whitney" at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Omaha (April 2009). Her hymns have been published in collections beyond the United States, including Australia, Canada, England, Scotland, and Hong Kong. More recently, she was awarded the Bishop's Cross during the Diocese of Nebraska's Annual Council in October 2016. Rae composed a new hymn for the sesquicentennial celebration of the Nebraska Diocese entitled "Sing God's praise, Episcopalians" observed in January 2018.

Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days

This text by Claudia Frances Ibotson Hernaman was part of Child's Book of Praise (1873), where it is designated a Lenten hymn. The daughter of an Anglican priest, Claudia Ibotson (1838-1898) was born in Surrey and married Rev. J. W. D. Hermaman in 1858. She wrote over 150 hymns, many of which were for children. She also translated hymns from Latin.

Hope of the World

Hope of the World beautifully incorporates the captivating melody, Wayfaring Stranger, which first appeared in the 1816 "shape-note" songbook, Kentucky Harmony, with the African-American spiritual, Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley. An inspired choice for worship throughout the year, it may be especially appropriate for Ash Wednesday. Lloyd Larson is a freelance composer living in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

For Everyone Born

Shirley Erena Murray's hymns transcend time and place. While she is from New Zealand, Murray (b. 1931) has collaborated with people across the world. For Everyone Born reflects many of the themes that appear in her hymns: justice, peace, equality, honoring of women, ecological concerns, and social responsibility. While this hymn can certainly be used for Communion, it can be employed on other occasions when the themes of justice, compassion, and reconciliation are a part of the service.

For Everyone Born debuted in Global Praise 2: Songs for Worship and Witness (New York, 2000). The words in verse one reflect the table on which we break bread. Everyone, regardless of their stature, deserves "clean water and bread" and a "safe place" to live. It also alludes to the star that shone the night Christ was born. This could mean that all people, who are created in God's image, deserve a birth that is celebrated and wanted.

Verse two reflects a table of equality: Too often, women have been deemed second-class citizens in the home, church, and society at large. Murray's words mean that someone should not be relegated to certain tasks or roles because of their gender or gender identity. The roles must be divided fairly with no single person possessing all of the power. It is through the "wisdom and grace" that only comes from God that there can be "a system that's fair" for all people.

A table of acceptance is the theme in verse three. It is a place where no matter the age, people's voices will be heard. Young and old will have "a part in the song." This table reflects a place where the old and the young walk hand in hand and support each other no matter the circumstances. It is a place where everyone belongs.

A table of reconciliation is prevalent in the fourth verse; however, it is a verse that is not without controversy because it is a radical idea. This is the table where the "just and unjust" and the "abuse [and] abuse" come together. A table where those who have hurt and those who hurt are sitting together is difficult to accept, but it is what we should and must strive for. It is a table where the anger and hurt can be let out in a safe place and where mercy and grace can help begin the healing process that brings about "a new way to live."

The final verse is a table of dignity. It is a place where people can safely "live without fear and simply to be." This table is a space for people "to work, to speak out, to witness and worship." People can freely work, speak their minds, and worship in the ways they have been called to do so. It is a place where everyone has "the right to be free."

Murray's hymn not only reflects human concerns, but it demonstrates God's care and concern for humankind, hence the refrain, in which God delights in those who create "justice, joy, compassion, and peace." God is concerned about humanity's well-being, is active in our lives, and uses people to make creation a better place for everyone and everything that dwells in it.

There's A Wideness in God's Mercy

Frederick William Faber was born on June 28, 1814, in Calverley, Yorkshire, England. He was raised as a strict Calvinist, strongly opposed to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Following graduation from Oxford, Faber was ordained into the Anglican Church ministry, and, for the next three years, he served a small parish at Elton, Huntingdonshire, England. Faber wrote many devotional and theological books, but he is best remembered today for the 150 hymn texts that were written by him.

There's a Wideness in God's Mercy is part of a 13-verse poem written by Faber entitled Come to Jesus. It began with the words, "Souls of men, why will ye scatter like a crowd of frightened sheep? Foolish hearts, why will ye wander from a love so true and deep?" The present hymn version uses only verses 4, 6, 8, and 12. There are some meaningful spiritual concepts expressed in Faber's text that are worthy of our contemplation, such as the line, "There's a kindness in His justice which is more than liberty." The final verse is also a beautiful expression of truth: "If our lives were but more simple, we should take Him at His word; and our lives would be all sunshine in the sweetness of the Lord."

Worship Art

This Ash Wednesday's bulletin cover art is an acrylic painting on raw canvas with digital drawing titled "Stardust" by Reverend Lisle Gwynn Garrity and takes inspiration from Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21.

Many of us begin Lent with ashen marks smudged against our foreheads, the oil glistening on our skin throughout the rest of the day. It's a mark that is holy because it tells the truth: we are formed from the dust, and to dust we shall one day return. We are not immortal. Death will one day find us all.

However, as we've crafted this Lenten series around the theme, Full to the Brim, we've found ourselves asking for more from our Lenten journey. Yes, death will surely find me one day, inhaling me into that infinite abyss. But the cross on my forehead only tells me part of the story. The empty tomb tells me a fuller, more expansive truth: death will not have the last word. There is more. God is more.

This expansive truth requires more of us. It invites us to abandon empty or showy practices of faith, and instead, draw inward to open ourselves to a deeper journey of transformation. It requires me to believe that I am truly worthy of love, belonging, and grace. It requires me to believe others are also.

In this Lenten season, we've reimagined this Ash Wednesday ritual. What if, instead of ashes, gold gleamed on our foreheads? What if, alongside the certainty of death, we are also reminded of God's expansive grace? What if on this day we said to one another, "From stardust you have come, and to stardust you shall one day return"?

—Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity



"Stardust" by Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity | Full to the Brim graphic design by Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman | Original photography by Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org