

# Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ

## Ash Wednesday



**February 14, 2024**

**7:00 pm**

We Practice Just Peace: doing justice, seeking peace  
We are Open and Affirming: welcoming LGBTQ+ people  
    We Listen for the Still Speaking God  
We are striving to be an Anti Racism church  
Our faith is 2000 years old; our thinking isn't.

## Prelude

The prelude is an invitation to personal preparation for worship.

## For Reflection and Contemplation

### *Ash Valentine*

*Not a box of chocolates  
or spray of roses,  
but ash smudged on your forehead:  
a reminder, dust,  
that you shall some day blow away.  
Dirt in the shape of a heart,  
dust in the form of a life—*

*now, this life:  
given, but so briefly,  
like a breath,  
cherished, with such sweet hope.  
A Valentine from God's own longing heart,  
both praise and plea:*

*Love you to death.  
Won't you be mine?*

—Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes

## Introit

Return to the Lord

Mark Bender

## Invitation to the Lenten Journey

Based on Psalm 51

Leader: Have mercy on us O God in your great kindness: in the fullness of your mercy blot out our transgressions. Wash away our guilt: and cleanse us from our sin.

**People: Create in us a clean heart, O God.**

Leader: For we acknowledge our faults: and our sin is always before us. Against you only have we sinned and done evil in your sight.

**People: Create in us a clean heart, O God.**

Leader: Create in us a clean heart, O God: and renew a right spirit within us. Do not cast us away from your presence; do not take your Holy Spirit from us.

**People: Create in us a clean heart, O God.**

Leader: Give us the joy of your help again; and strengthen us with a willing spirit. O Lord, open our lips, and our mouths shall proclaim your praise.

**People: Create in us a clean heart, O God.**

Leader: Tonight, we begin a sacred journey; a journey within. In Christ, God calls us toward authenticity and wholeness, toward honesty and love. Jesus' pathway to the cross invites us to a life of sacrifice, a life of self-giving, a life of knowing what we truly need and do not need. This is a rocky road, an uphill excursion; our hope is in God, who makes all things new.

## Silence for Personal Reflection and Confession

*Some of our sin is known and some remains unknown and unseen.*

\*Those who are able may rise.

**\*Hymn**                      Dust and Ashes Touch Our Face                      NCH (black) #186

## Unison Prayer of Confession

NCH (black) #835

**Gentle and holy God, we acknowledge to you, to one another, and to ourselves that we are not what you have called us to be. We have stifled our gifts and wasted our time. We have avoided opportunities to offer kindness, but have been quick to take offense. We have pretended that we could make no contribution to peace and justice in our world and have excused ourselves from risk-taking in our own community. Have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and help us to live our lives differently, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, whose call to follow haunts our every prayer. Amen.**

**Scripture**                                      Joel 2:12-16a                                      Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

**Anthem**                                      Create in Me a Clean Hear, O God                                      Carl Schalk

**Reflection for Ash Wednesday**                                      Rev. Rebecca Larson

## Pastoral Prayer

### Lord's Prayer

**All: 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.

\*\*We believe that God is revealed in persons of all genders and sorts; we also honor tradition.

## Invitation to Confession and Reconciliation (Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes)

Leader: Most holy and merciful God,

**People: to you and to one another we confess our sin. We have sinned in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven as you have forgiven us.**

**Sung Response**          Savior, When in Tears and Dust          NCH (black) #185  
Verses 1 & 2

### Collective Movement to Reconciliation

Leader: We have been untrue to the spirit of Christ. We have grieved you, and we are sorrowful.

**People: Have mercy on us, O God.**

Leader: Our unfaithfulness to you, our distrust, our neglect of your faithful grace, our failure to live wholly for you,

**People: we confess to you, God.**

Leader: Our unfaithfulness in prayer and worship, our failure to nurture the faith that is in us, our negligence of the Holy Spirit,

**People: we confess to you, God.**

Leader: Our self-indulgence and exploitation of others, our participation in injustice and oppression, and our failure to act or speak out, our love of worldly goods and comforts, our defense of our privilege, our pride and impatience, our envy and our quickness to judge and not to heal,

**People: we confess to you, God.**

Leader: Our waste and pollution of your creation, our blindness to the awe and beauty which you have given us,

**People: we confess to you, God.**

**Sung Response**          Savior, When in Tears and Dust          NCH (black) #185  
Verse 3

Leader: Accept our repentance, God, for the wrongs we have done. For our blindness to human need and suffering, and to your presence in the poor, for our indifference to injustice and cruelty, for our failure to love courageously,

**People: accept our repentance, God.**

Leader: For our judgments, fear, anger and all uncharitable thoughts toward others, for our prejudice and contempt of those who differ from us, for all that is hurtful that we have done,

**People: accept our repentance, God.**

Leader: Restore us, gracious God, for your mercy is great.

**All: Hear us, O God, for your grace is the source of our life. Amen**

## **Imposition of Ashes**

*From ancient times Christians have on this day searched their hearts and sought to be cleansed from sin. They have sought reconciliation with God and with one another. They have received ashes marked on their foreheads as a sign of sin's disfigurement and of their own mortality.*

*Ashes remind us that by God's grace in Christ we received the gift of new life.*

*Ashes are imposed with the words:*

*"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." – Genesis 3:19*

## **Closing Prayer** (Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes)

**Gracious God, you made us from the dust of the earth, and breathed your Spirit into us to give us life. The dust is the dust of stars. You have made us from light, and your Spirit Blazes within us. Your glory shines in us. But we have veiled your glory, and lost sight of your light. We have clung to the dust, but not the light, the Spirit of Life. Renew your light in us this Lenten season. May we again become true earthlings, pure stardust, living light. Renew your Spirit within us, that we may live. Amen**

## **Sung Response**

Savior, When in Tears and Dust  
Verse 4

NCH (black) #185

## **Benediction**

## **Postlude**

*Remember that God is by your side.*

*If you are able, hold a few moments of silence at the conclusion of this worship practice.*

## **What is Lent?**

Believed to have evolved from the Old English word lencten, Lent takes place during the time when days are lengthening in the northern hemisphere. Traditionally, the 40 days of Lent have been for Christians a time of repentance, sacrifice, and rededication to a faithful relationship with God. In Lent, we invite one another to a more thoughtful, inward spiritual experience. Study, quiet prayer, walking the labyrinth, additional worship experiences, and community service (as a positive form of sacrifice) are some of the ways you might observe Lent alongside other Christians.

## **What is Ash Wednesday?**

In the Hebrew Bible, ashes symbolize repentance, sorrow, and mortality. For many centuries, Christians have marked the beginning of Lent by receiving ashes on their foreheads at an Ash Wednesday service. This evening is one of repentance and re-orienting around the divine, revealed in Christ. Ash Wednesday services focus on our natural tendency as humans to lose track of our pathway toward our home in God. Given the fact of our mortality, it is important to find that pathway and to renew our relationship with God on a regular basis. This process of renewal includes being honest about our shortcomings and failures as well as celebrating the surprising grace of our forgiving and loving God. Tonight, we begin, once again, our journey with Jesus towards the cross.