

Prelude

Welcome

Greeting

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And also, with you.

Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins.

God's mercy endures forever.

Prayer

Loving God, we have to admit that we don't like Ash Wednesday all that much. We would rather skip the penitence and soul-searching of Lent and skip right to the joy of Easter morning. The world teaches us that mistakes are awful and should be covered up at all cost. We learn to blame others instead of owning up to what we do and the pain we inflict.

Give us the strength in this time of Lent to ask for forgiveness for the hurt we cause and the mistakes we make. Remind us that the difficulties of life form and shape us. Teach us how to turn back to you, to love our neighbor, and to reach out to those who suffer. We know, God, that Jesus spent forty days in the desert preparing for his ministry to the world. We ask that you use these forty days of Lent to prepare us for our mission to the world in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" #2158

Scripture Reading Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Silent Meditation

What will it mean to you to return to God with all your heart?

Song "All I Need is You" #2080

Scripture Reading

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Silent Meditation

Pray for those who, because of their commitment to the work of Christ in the world, experience imprisonment, torture, and even death.

Hymn "Have Thine Own Way, Lord" #382

Gospel Reading

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Silent Meditation

Where is your treasure?

Hymn "More Love to Thee, O Christ" #453

Invitation to the Observance of Lenten Discipline

Pastor: Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: the early Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the church that before the Easter celebration there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation.

During this season converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins and had separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to participation in the life of the Church. In this way the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith. In this way, members of the congregation received healing for their souls.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on the scriptures.

