



WHAT ARE YOU UP TO? Lent 2024



Serve & Enrich
Zion United Church
of Christ

Ash Wednesday: Store Up

Welcome

Prelude

Gathering—Lent is often known as a time of giving something up in order to make room in our lives for spiritual pursuits. Rather than just “giving up” in Lent, the scriptures ask us to consider all that Jesus is “up to” and all that he asks us to be up to in his name. Instead of bemoaning what we can’t do, or used to do, in a culture where “measuring up” to external standards seems impossible, this Lent we will celebrate the small things that we can do right now to respond to God's call in our place, for our time.

As we begin this Lent season, we contemplate the essence and the substance of our lives. Do we spend time reaching for “must haves” that our culture says we need? Or are we storing up the things that bring us closer to the reign of God, the good things — the treasures — that fill us and others with well-being of body, mind, and spirit? Tonight, as we remember how fragile this life is, we celebrate the beginning of this journey that reveals to us how far God’s love will go that we might have life and have it abundantly.

Gathering Hymn

What Wondrous Love Is This, 257

Prayer— Merciful God, we come before you knowing that change must happen in our lives. But at times facing those changes feels overwhelming. We feel the external expectations that distract and draw us into less important pursuits. In this moment of quiet, we lift up to you those things we’d like to give up for good...for the sake of The Good.

The Lord's Prayer (unison)—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.

Choir

You Raise Me Up

We Hear God's Word

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 (NRSV)

Our reading tonight uses the original Hebrew word "Abba" rather than "Father." In Hebrew this word is more intimate and less formal than our English word "father."

Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Abba in heaven.

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. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Abba who sees in secret will reward you.

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. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Abba who is in secret; and your Abba who sees in secret will reward you.

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. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Abba who is in secret; and your Abba who sees in secret will reward you.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Reflection

Store Up

Hymn

Just As I Am, 354

We Respond to God's Word with Our Giving

Invitation— Jesus comes down to us as a gift of presence, compassion, and companionship. His entire life is a demonstration of committed generosity and stewardship. We too are called to present our lives as a gift to the God who

has created us and the world that needs what we have to offer in time, talent, and treasure. Let us reveal the glory of God by the giving of our good gifts.+

An Uplifting Gift—Hot Air Balloon Messages: You're invited throughout the season of Lent, to share uplifting messages as a gift to our church family by writing them on the hot air balloons that you'll find on the side table. The messages could be scriptures you've found inspiring, quotes that nurture your spirit, or just a simple message like "you are not alone." We'll add those messages to our sky each week.

Doxology

We Give Thanks— Generous God, may these gifts bring you glory and honor and meet the needs of your people. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.+

We Come Seeking Forgiveness—*Our prayer for forgiveness tonight at the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 51. Hear the confessions of the Psalmist's heart as you lay before God your own brokenness:* Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love! Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great compassion! Wash me completely clean of my guilt; purify me from my sin... Create a clean heart for me, God; put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me! Please don't throw me out of your presence; please don't take your holy spirit away from me. Return the joy of your salvation to me and sustain me with a willing spirit... Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will proclaim your praise. You don't want sacrifices. If I gave an entirely burned offering, you wouldn't be pleased. A broken spirit is my sacrifice, God. You won't despise a heart, God, that is broken and crushed. Amen.

We Receive God's Grace—Indeed, God does not despise us but offers to us grace. It is true—God wipes away our wrongdoings with great compassion. In the name of Christ, you are forgiven. Glory to God. Amen!

Ritual of Ashes

The imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday is a Christian tradition implemented in the 11th century when Ash Wednesday was added to the liturgical calendar. The reference to ashes as part of a tradition of penitence was connected with wearing sackcloth in the book of Daniel. In those early days of marking Ash Wednesday, those who had been ousted from the church would wear sackcloth and

ashes all through Lent until they rejoined the church on Maundy Thursday by receiving the holy meal once again with the faithful.

We don't believe in ousting people from the church. We are all in need of reconnection with Divine Love and our church is a place where mercy is the order of *every* day. But on Ash Wednesday we remember that we are not [superhuman]. We are not perfect and we will not live forever. This year we commit to making the most out of our one, precious life by being up to something good. Rather than give something up as penitence this year, we are focusing on the little things that lift up our lives and the lives of others...even the smallest actions of our lives can elevate us all to a higher plane of love, mercy, and justice. These, then are the treasures we must store up. Let our ashes this day remind us of how precious is our time together on this earth.

You're invited to come forward to receive ashes, a reminder of how fragile and precious this life is. If you'd like to receive ashes on your hand instead of your forehead, please extend your hand as you come forward. If you'd like to remain seated and for me to come to you, you're welcome to do so. Just raise your hand.

For those who are worshipping with us at home and received ashes, you're invited to mark yourself with ashes either on your forehead or hand. If you did not receive ashes, you can symbolically mark yourself.

The Imposition of Ashes

Prayer— Author of the Cosmos, our view of this world is so limited but you create and see and know all things. May our life practices be used in ways that reverberate to the edges of possibility, treasures in heaven, multiplied on earth through your love. Amen.

Hymn

Be Thou My Vision, 502

A Blessing for the Journey

And so now go into the world,
knowing that there are treasures all around,
waiting to be amplified and lifted up.
May this season be one of soaring with the Spirit,
in the name of Jesus Christ,
and in the love and mercy of the Creator.

When someone asks you, “What are you up to?”
you can respond,
“With God’s help, I’m up to Something Good!”

Let the people say, Amen!
Amen!

Postlude