

# A Lenten Journey

## From Ashes to the Cross

*The liturgical season of Lent is a time set apart for penitence, prayer, and fasting. Ash Wednesday begins this season as we place ashes on the forehead, a symbol of humility and sorrow for sin. We move then through six weeks of intentional worship, study, and service, as we contemplate Christ's life and ministry, and walk to the cross with Him. Lent culminates in Holy Week, which spans Palm Sunday through Holy Saturday, and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.*

*We hope that you will join us each Wednesday evening at 7:00 p.m. for candlelight vespers in the sanctuary, which includes the Lord's Supper. The pastors will preach each week using one of the readings from the Daily Lectionary.*

*After vespers, you are invited to join us in the Craig Room for conversation and reflection upon the Scripture passage which is the basis for that evening's sermon. In the following pages, you will find study questions to help you meditate upon the text beforehand. The preacher for that day will facilitate the discussion. We will end our time together by 8:30 p.m. You are welcome to attend any of the weeks, or all!*

*It is our hope that you will be blessed with a deep and abiding sense of God's grace and mercy through this holy season. As we prepare to experience the devastating events of Holy Week, may we hold fast to the hope which is ours through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Lord.*

# ASH WEDNESDAY

*March 1, 2017*

*Rev. Dr. Conrad C. Sharps*

**Scriptures:**

**Joel 2:1-17**

**2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10**

**Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

The focus of our text from the Book of Joel is that of repentance. It is an explicit, frightening description of the impending judgment of God upon the people. But amid the pending doom, there is a promise of hope if the people will repent and turn their hearts toward the Lord.

In 2 Corinthians we read of the strained relationship between the church in Corinth and the Apostle Paul. Paul's leadership is challenged and in our text he addresses the need and the promise of reconciliation. He assures his readers, that just as God has reconciled the people with Him through Christ, so through God's grace the people can be united and reconciled, not only with Paul, but also with one another.

In our Matthew text, we read of Jesus reminding the people of the obligations righteous Jews must observe: almsgiving, fasting, and prayer. He does so, however, as he warns them against the dangers of self-piety for the sake of public approval. Such insincere acts do not please God, who judges people by the sincerity of their hearts, minds, and true desires.

(see page 4)

1. How is repentance described in Joel?
2. What will be the result of the people's repentance?
3. How does Paul describe the process of true reconciliation to the church in Corinth?
4. What is the role of Christ in reconciliation?
5. What are the dangers of false piety according to Jesus in our text from Matthew?
6. How do we truly honor God according to Jesus in our text and is there a downside to the witness of the Church today if we read this literally?

Read Genesis 3:19

What does this verse ultimately mean to you?

*March 8, 2017*  
*Rev. Lynn M. Portz*

**Scripture:**  
**Deuteronomy 9:13-21**

The book of Deuteronomy consists of three addresses that Moses gives to the people of Israel as they prepare to end their time in the wilderness and enter the Promised Land. Moses reminds the people of the covenant that God has made with them, and urges them to be faithful to God as they begin their new life together in Canaan. Read the entire chapter 9, understanding that it is Moses who is speaking to God's people.

1. Looking at the context of this entire chapter, what is the general point Moses is making to them?
2. In what ways were the people “stubborn”?
3. In what ways are God's people today stubborn and rebellious?

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4. What is God's first reaction to the people's rebellion?
  
5. What convinced God to change this reaction?
  
6. Do you think that God still changes His mind? If so, why?

*March 15, 2017*  
*Rev. John F. Magnuson*

**Scripture:**  
**John 5:1-18**

Early in Jesus' ministry, He sets the precedent that the burdens of the people would be more important than the burdens of Sabbath law. As Jesus begins to live this mission out, we experience rising tension between Jesus and the religious authorities. Stuck in the middle of all of this is a man who was once paralyzed but can now walk.

1. Jesus notices a paralyzed man who has been ill for 38 years and asks him, "do you want to be made well?" Why would Jesus ask such a question? How do you react to what seems to be a question with such an obvious answer?
2. In what ways was this man "made well"?
3. What areas in your life do you hope for Jesus to find you and make you well?

*March 22, 2017*  
*Rev. Todd E. Leach*

**Scripture:**  
**John 8:12-20**

As the Feast of the Tabernacle draws to a close and the light fades from the golden lamps in the temple court, Jesus proclaims “I am the light of the world.” A group of Pharisees take issue with Jesus’ proclamation and begin questioning the validity of His statement. Christ assures His inquisitors that “the Father who sent Me testifies on My behalf.” The Pharisees, though, know neither Jesus nor His Father.

1. Why can light be both a threat and a benefit?
2. Jesus tells the Pharisees that they do not know His Father, yet His Father is the God of Israel. Why does Jesus make this statement? How do we, as Christians, know the Father?
3. While we continue our Lenten journey, how do we experience the light described in this text?

*March 29, 2017*  
*Rev. John F. Magnuson*

**Scripture:**  
**John 6:27-40**

A day before our passage takes place, Jesus feeds 5,000 people on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The night before our passage, the disciples see Jesus walking on the waters of the Galilee. And in our passage for tonight, these same disciples ask for a sign from Jesus. Jesus' reply, "I am the bread of life...you have seen Me and yet do not believe."

1. Why do we sometimes have a hard time believing things that we *have* seen? How about things we *have not* seen?
2. Do your heart and your eyes always agree on what they see? How do you reconcile the difference?
3. As Christians, we are called to believe in the One whom God has sent. What conditions do we add to that before we can believe and therefore follow?



*April 5, 2017*  
*Rev. Lynn M. Portz*

**Scripture:**  
**John 10:1-18**

Immediately after this discourse, some of “the Jews” concluded that Jesus was out of His mind, and a short while later, they picked up stones to throw at Him. Read the passage and hear it through the ears of the faithful Jews of Jesus’ day. What was so offensive to them about what Jesus said?

1. Ponder the difference between the “hired hand” of verses 12-13 and the good shepherd. What is the chief distinction between the two?
2. What does it mean to you that Jesus “knows” His own?
3. What does abundant life look like in our world today?
4. In what ways is the abundant life that Jesus offers similar or different from the abundant life of our present-day culture?

## **Lenten Prayer**

*God of all joy,  
fill our souls to overflowing  
with the fullness of Your grace.  
In this season,  
remind us of Your triumph over the tragedy of the cross,  
and Your victory for us over the powers of sin and death,  
so that we may reflect your glory  
as disciples of Jesus Christ,  
our risen Lord.*

**Amen.**

*From Book of Common Worship Daily Prayer*