

Sacred Soil: An Ash Wednesday Experience**Wednesday, February 17, 2021 || Ash Wednesday || Pastor Christy Wright***We invite you to light a candle at 7:00 PM and join us in prayer ONLINE or over the PHONE**Audio worship, including music, prayers, and the sermon is available at**<https://georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services>***Audio worship is also available at (978) 990-5000, access code 719365#. Just dial in, enter the access code on your keypad, and you will hear the service begin with music.***This service is adapted from Marcia McFee's Holy Vessels Lenten Series.***Prelude***Melissa Quilitzsch***Welcome***Ash Wednesday is a time of naming brokenness. As we enter the season of Lent, we commit to enter also into a season of healing and recovery that requires the naming of what has been shattered as a first step. We take "the yoke" of responsibility as disciples of Jesus to be the Body of Christ—a body of those who need healing and offer healing in the world. The promise of Jesus is that he is with us in our weariness and burdens.***Opening Prayer***One: As we gather tonight, in the darkness of the evening and in the weight of this past year, we meet with You, God, as vessels for Your will and purpose.**All: Vessels, holy and whole. Broken, needing the One. Open, body and soul. Healer, come.**One: In our weariness, we mourn all that we have lost, but we know that we are not alone.**All: Vessels, holy and whole. Broken, needing the One. Open, body and soul. Healer, come.**One: Give us hope and peace, knowing that You have brought us to a place of healing. You are our Healer.**All: Vessels, holy and whole. Broken, needing the One. Open, body and soul. Healer, come. Amen.***First Reflection***Bless the Lord**Taize**Bless the Lord, my soul. And bless God's holy name**Bless the Lord, my soul, who leads me into life.***Scripture Reading***Matthew 11:28-30**"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest in your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."***Second Reflection***Wait for the Lord**Taize**Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.**Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart.***Scripture Reading***Matthew 6:25-34**"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly God feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will God not much more clothe you - you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly God knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."*

Prayer of Confession

We will be living with stories of Jesus' healing in the Gospel of Matthew in this Lent season. We will see how Jesus encouraged people to open up about their lives as part of the healing process—no matter how broken. Ash Wednesday developed as a doorway to speaking the truth of our lives, a time to lay the brokenness of life before God.

Let us pray:

Merciful God, we have lived a year of Lent. In the midst of it all we have seen love shine through at times but as we look back in this moment, it feels like a year of shattered dreams and shattered peace. We are discouraged. Even though so much feels out of our control, we also see the ways our own faults and failures to love each other fully, to care for the least, to honor your creation, to stand for what is right and good, have contributed to the shattering. And so we come to you in pieces. Fragments, broken shells of our past selves. As we walk along the shores of Uncertainty and Pain, we ask that you meet us here. Help us, Healer. Show us our strength. Forgive our inertia. Move us to move one step at a time toward greater care. In this silence, we sense and acknowledge our yearning for wholeness.

Let us pray together:

Vessels, holy and whole. Broken, needing the One. Open, body and soul. Healer, come.

Prayer of Assurance

Time and adversity... making something beautiful out of that which, once seen as ordinary and broken, is now considered a transformed and precious piece. This is the journey we undertake. Jesus attended to those considered ordinary, broken, even those deemed unworthy. No matter what, Jesus is the lover of our souls.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

Glory to God. Amen.

Scripture Reading

John 16:33

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Prayers of the People

Lover of our souls, You who weeps, bleeds, cries, waits...for us and because of us, we come before you to make our petitions known. Hear our cries for healing of body, mind, and spirit. We know that already you are at work among us, showing us the way to recovery from the toxicities and grief of our time. We pray for those who are shattered by the violence of circumstances, tumbled by the forces of life, and washed up on shores, distant from all that feels whole. In your love, make us whole. May we rest in your compassion. Calm the lost, weary soul in the warmth of your love. May your peace fill our hearts. May we know the love of Jesus. By your grace, you console. Make us holy, make us whole. Amen.

Third Reflection

Hear Our Prayer

Taize

O Lord, hear our prayer. O Lord, hear our prayer. When we call, answer us.

O Lord, hear our prayer. O Lord, hear our prayer. Come and listen to us.

Meditation of the Ashes and Soil

Ash Wednesday, as the beginning of Lent, developed in the 5th - 6th centuries, and was mandated in the 11th century. Although Protestants did not maintain this ritual for the most part, it has come back during the 20th century liturgical movement as an important time for reflection in which we reclaimed this symbol and ritual of our spiritual ancestors. It plays an important role in helping us make meaning in the brokenness of our lives. This year, indeed, we are aware of the fragility of life. Even though we cannot share ashes in the ways we have become accustomed, let us engage in a ritual that draws us close to the elements of creation. Let it remind us that we are a part of creation, in all its beauty and its brokenness.

You are invited to hold your burlap cross as we pray together:

Holy Creator God... as we feel this elemental part of who we are, we remember that we ourselves were made from the dust of the earth. To experience brokenness is the way of creation, it is not something to be ashamed of... it is the order of things. Transform us, O God. Help us recover the beauty of who we are and see the goodness in transformation. Amen.

You are invited to hold your paper heart - which is in fact paper infused with wild flower seeds that you are invited to plant as you see fit - as we pray together:

Holy Creator God... as we feel this elemental part of who we are, we remember that we ourselves are connected to the earth and found to be nourished in the darkness of soil. We remember that God does the best work in the dark - for it is here where we experience the resurrection of Christ in our everyday lives. Transform us, O God. Help us recover the beauty of who we are and see the goodness in transformation. Amen.

Vessels, holy and whole. Broken, needing the One. Open, body and soul. Healer, come.

Benediction

Now go with confidence that, though shattered, we are held. Begin the journey of recovering your depth of love for all and your joy of living in this world. May the words of Jesus ring in your ears: "I will give you rest." And may the Spirit hover, move, and deliver salve to your soul and a spring in your step. Amen.

Postlude

Bless the Lord

Taize

*Bless the Lord, my soul. And bless God's holy name
Bless the Lord, my soul, who leads me into life.*