

# Ash Wednesday Worship



**Fairlawn Avenue United Church**  
**17 February 2021~ 7:00 p.m. (on Zoom)**

## **Instructions for Ashes @Home**

*Have ready: A small piece of paper (large post-it note or something), matches, a ceramic or glass plate or dish, and tablespoon of water in a cup.*

*On the small piece of paper, you will be invited to write down one or two things that you yearn to let go of or be freed from in your life. Sit with your words for a few moments, reading them over again, imagining what it would be like to be released from those things. Place the paper on a small dish or plate when you are ready and light it carefully with the match - once it is finished burning, set the plate aside. Later in the service, you will put your finger in the water, and then gently stir the ash from the burnt paper with your moistened finger - once your finger is blackened by the ash, you will be invited to use your finger to make a sign of the cross on the back of your other hand, as we say the words in the service together at that point.*

## **Opening (Douglas)**

Let us stop, listen, and turn. Let the busyness of your body - rest. Let the worries of your mind - rest. Let the nagging doubts of your heart - rest. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent - a season of hope and life. Lent isn't about being dreary and gloomy. Lent is an opportunity to focus on what has become stagnant or routine in our spiritual life, as well as in daily life. A time to discover things that enable faith to grow, and life to adapt and change. In a society of distraction, consumption, and complexity, Lent's offer of simplicity and mindfulness is freeing.

We are entering a holy time. In the coming days we are invited to journey to the sacred centre of our faith. We are entering the depths of our own hearts. At the centre of our faith, in the depth of our hearts, Jesus is waiting for us, reaching out to us, inviting us to leave ordinary time and to follow him along the journey that brought him to the Cross, and beyond. Listen in the silence, for Jesus is calling you.

## **Silence**

## **Prayer (Jean)**

Thank you Oh Love for revealing, through the story of Christ's death and resurrection, that our mortality is not to be feared. Open our hearts and minds in this time together so that your Spirit may cultivate in us a richer sense of love and compassion.

**Amen.**

## **Hymn      *Come and Find the Quiet Centre***

Come and find the quiet centre  
in the crowded life we lead,  
find the room for hope to enter,

find the frame where we are freed:  
clear the chaos and the clutter,  
clear our eyes, that we can see  
all the things that really matter,  
be at peace, and simply be.

*clear the chaos and the clutter,  
clear our eyes, that we can see  
all the things that really matter,  
be at peace, and simply be,  
be at peace and simply be.*

*(Douglas)*

We now invite you into a Christian practice of contemplating the Psalms. The Book of Psalms is a book from the Hebrew Bible, a collection of songs and prayers by those seeking and seeing the Holy One.

Contemplation is a style of meditation where one examines deeply the nature of a thing. To contemplate is to gaze upon something in one's heart or mind until God's nature within that thing is revealed to you.

So, I invite you to settle in where you find yourself this night. Begin to breathe and place your attention on your breath. Let your other thoughts pass you by. Do not allow them to take up space and time. There is no need to control your breathing during this time of contemplation, just allow yourself to breathe naturally.

As the psalm is read to you, allow your heart to gaze upon these words and listen for God's Spirit speaking in, among, and between them. At the end there will be a period of silence, followed by a time of sharing from the heart if you wish to.

**Reading Psalm 90** (*Jill Klaehn*)

Eternal and Immortal One,  
you have been our refuge in all generations.  
Before the mountains were brought forth,  
before you had formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting  
you are the Alpha and the Omega.

When our days on earth are ended,  
you welcome us home to your heart,  
to the city of light, where time is eternal  
and days are not numbered.  
You gather those who love you as friends  
returning from a long journey,  
giving rest to their souls.  
You anoint them with the balm of understanding,  
healing wounds of the past.

For our days on earth are a mystery,  
a searching after you

a yearning for the great mystery  
to make itself known.

The years pass and soon the harvest is at hand  
a time to reap the fruits of one's life.

Who has lived with integrity?  
Who will reflect the Light?  
Who can bear the radiant beams of Love?  
Who have revered the Counsellor,  
and opened their hearts to the Spirit of Truth?

Teach us, O Beloved, to honour each day  
that we may have a heart of wisdom.

**Response**    *(Guided by Jean & Douglas)*

**Hymn**    ***We Cannot Measure How You Heal***

We cannot measure how you heal  
or answer every sufferer's prayer,  
yet we believe your grace responds  
where faith and doubt unite to care.

Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,  
survive to hold and heal and warn,  
to carry all through death to life  
and cradle children yet unborn.

The pain that will not go away,  
the guilt that clings from things long past,  
the fear of what the future holds,  
are present as if meant to last.

But present too is love which tends  
the hurt we never hope to find,  
the private agonies inside,  
the memories that haunt the mind.

So some have come who need your help  
and some have come to make amends,  
as hands which shaped and saved the world  
are present in the touch of friends.

Lord, let your Spirit meet us here  
to mend the body, mind, and soul,  
to disentangle peace from pain  
and make your broken people whole.

## **What God Can Do Within the Dust** (*Jean*)

The word 'human' comes from the Latin *humus*, which means earth. Being human means acknowledging that we're made from the earth and will return to the earth. For a few years we dance around on the stage of life and have the chance to reflect a little bit of God's glory. We are earth that has come to consciousness. If we discover this power in ourselves and know that we are God's creatures, that we come from God and return to God, that's enough. – Richard Rohr, *Simplicity: The Art of Living*

As a mother has compassion on her children,  
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.

**For God knows how we were made;  
God remembers that we are dust.** – *Psalm 103.13-14*

The season of Lent begins with a grittiness. Ashes made from last year's palm branches form a rough and imperfect symbol upon our foreheads. The gritty cross reminds us of our own mortality and sin before God, but also points us toward the way of reconciliation and ultimate redemption.

*On a small piece of paper, write down one or two things that you yearn to let go of, or be freed from in your life. Sit with your words for a few moments, reading them over, and imagining what it would be like to be released from those things.*

## **Blessing the Dust** (*Derek Wishart*)

All those days  
you felt like dust,  
like dirt,  
as if all you had to do  
was turn your face  
toward the wind  
and be scattered  
to the four corners

or swept away  
by the smallest breath  
as insubstantial—

Did you not know  
what the Holy One  
can do with dust?

This is the day  
we freely say  
we are scorched.

This is the hour  
we are marked  
by what has made it  
through the burning.

This is the moment  
we ask for the blessing  
that lives within  
the ancient ashes,  
that makes its home  
inside the soil of  
this sacred earth.

So let us be marked  
not for sorrow.  
And let us be marked  
not for shame.  
Let us be marked  
not for false humility  
or for thinking  
we are less  
than we are

but for claiming  
what God can do  
within the dust,  
within the dirt,  
within the stuff  
of which the world  
is made,  
and the stars that blaze  
in our bones,  
and the galaxies that spiral  
inside the smudge  
we bear.

- Jan Richardson

### **Prayer** (*Douglas*)

O God,  
you have made us for yourself,  
and against your longing there is no defence.  
Mark us with your love,  
and release in us a passion for your justice in our disfigured world;  
that we may turn from our guilt and face you,  
our heart's desire. **Amen.**

*Take the piece of paper you have written on, set it on a plate or dish. Take a match and carefully light the piece of paper. Once it has burned completely set it aside to allow the ashes to cool.*

### **The Letting Go** (*Douglas*)

We lay down what is past...

**We lay down what is past and look to the future.**

**We take into our daily life signs of hope and healing, as those who are**

**forgiven and forgiving. We reach beyond ourselves to share the lives of others, and touch a wider world.**

**Song**      *In God Alone*

In God alone my soul can find rest and peace, in God my peace and joy.  
Only in God my soul can find its rest, find its rest and peace.      *Taizé Community*

**The Ashes** (*Jean*)

O God, blessed mother of the universe,  
We are your sacred children.  
O God, blessed teacher and guide,  
We are your sacred children.  
O God, blessed wind and holy breath,  
We are your sacred children.

Journeying on our many roads, we gather here.  
We bring our life.  
Raising a city from the dust,  
We bring our love.  
Gathering in our homes,  
We bring our light.

In this place, on a day of ashes,  
We bring our pain.  
Where a light will leap to the heavens,  
We bring our fear.  
Where ashes will fall,  
We acknowledge our mortality.

Where dust and ash will join,  
We bring our love.  
Take all that keeps us from burning brightly;  
Free our hearts.  
Take all that keeps us from loving fully;  
Free our hearts.  
Inspire and fill us with hope and boldness;  
Renew our Spirit.

(*Douglas*)

It is a strange anointing, this cross that comes to mark us as Lent begins. Ashes, dust, dirt: the stuff we walk upon, that we sweep away, that we work to get rid of, now comes to remind us who we are, where we are from, where we are bound.

Ash Wednesday invites us to come back to earth.  
To wonder at the gift of life, my life, our life  
with the earth, the shared body of our existence.  
These ashes were once trees and shrubs, full of life.  
Now they are black and grey. Dry. Lifeless.  
But mixed with the waters of our baptism

they help the seeds of God's new life take deeper root in us  
and bring forth the fruits of justice, peace, and generosity.  
These are ashes worth wearing.  
May we accept this gift, and be blessed.  
For from the burnt ashes will spring the green shoot of life  
rooted in God's unending love.

*Dip a finger in the water and stir the ashes lightly. Once the ash has turned into a paste, as we say the words that follow, take your blackened finger from the ashes and make a sign of the cross on the back of your other hand. If you are with another person, you may wish to make the sign of the cross on one another's forehead, or back of the hand.*

### **Imposition of Ashes**

**We remember that we are dust,  
and to dust we shall return.  
Yet, out of death comes new life.**

### **Closing Words – Rend Your Heart**

*(J)* To receive this blessing,  
all you have to do  
is let your heart break.  
Let it crack open.  
Let it fall apart  
so that you can see  
its secret chambers,  
the hidden spaces  
where you have hesitated  
to go.

*(D)* Your entire life  
is here, inscribed whole  
upon your heart's walls:  
every path taken  
or left behind,  
every face you turned toward  
or turned away,  
every word spoken in love  
or in rage,  
every line of your life  
you would prefer to leave  
in shadow,  
every story that shimmers  
with treasures known  
and those you have yet  
to find.

*(J)* It could take you days  
to wander these rooms.  
Forty, at least.

And so let this be  
a season for wandering  
for trusting the breaking  
for tracing the tear  
that will return you

to the One who waits  
who watches  
who works within  
the rending  
to make your heart  
whole.

- Jan Richardson

**Benediction** (*Douglas*)

And now, beloved friends,  
we all are being made new  
by the light and love that made us.  
Go, therefore,  
and share the light and love within you  
with those you meet along your path.  
**Amen.**