

Be Reconciled to God - Ash Wednesday 2017

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Date: 01 March 2017

Preacher: Pastor Jean Edmister

[0 : 00] Good evening, everyone. Good evening. Welcome to our worship service, our Ash Wednesday worship service. I don't have a lot of announcements, just a reminder that the fish fry dinners start this Friday from 4 to 7.

And if you're not working at it, you can always volunteer to do that, or you can just come and enjoy dinner. And we hope that you will have a meaningful season of Lent, and that's why we're starting out tonight with Ash Wednesday.

Shall we pray together? O holy and gracious God, it is such a joy and such a blessing to come and be with you tonight, to be gathered sisters and brothers in Christ, to remember what the season of Lent is about.

And we just ask, God, that you would send your Holy Spirit to walk among us. Lift our hearts up to you in praise and honor.

Help us to remember the great gift that you have given to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. and help us to live a life that's pleasing in your sight.

[1 : 16] We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll be singing our opening hymn, Lord, Who, Throughout These 40 Days. If you'd like to stand here, welcome to.

Lord, Who, Throughout These 40 Days.

Lord, Who, throughout These 40 Days for us, didst last and pray, Teach us with thee to mourn, Our sins and clothes by thee to stay.

As thou with Satan didst content, And didst thou victory win, O give us strength in thee, To fight in thee, To conquer sin.

As thou didst hunger, And first, So teach us, Gracious Lord, To die to self And chiefly heard By thy most holy word.

[2 : 43] And through these days of many turns, And through thy passion tied, Yea, you will glorify And death, Jesus, With all us abide.

Won't you be seated, please. I wanted to share with you this invitation to the observance of Lent.

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 there would be 40 days of meditation and preparation before the celebration of Easter.

This was traditionally the time when new converts were prepared for baptism and membership in the church. And those who had fallen away into sin were also reconciled and forgiven and brought back into the fellowship of the church.

We all are in need of God's mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And therefore, Therefore, I invite you in the name of the church to observe a holy Lent.

[4 : 04] By self-examination and repentance. By prayer and fasting. By self-denial. And the reading of God's holy word. To make a new beginning in the faith.

As a sign of your intention to observe a faithful Lent. I invite you to join me in reading responsibly from Psalm 25 verses 1 through 10.

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, do you not trust. Let me not be put to shame. Let not my enemies be stalled over me.

Let none that wait for you be put to shame. Let them be ashamed for our clothes of the treasurer. Make me to know your ways, O Lord.

Teach me your past. Lead me in your truth and teach me. For you are a God of my salvation. For you are a faith all day long.

[5 : 07] Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love. For they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions.

According to your steadfast love. Remember me. For the sake of your witness, O Lord. Good and upright is the Lord.

Therefore the Lord instructs sinners in the way. And leads the humble in what is right. And teaches them their way. All the paths of the Lord are set of paths of love and faithfulness.

For those who keep the Lord's common and testimonies. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen. As we gather together, unworthy as we are to even enter into the presence of the Lord, we know that it is the Lord who makes us able.

Amen? Amen. We give to the Lord not because we have obligation to the Lord, but we give to the Lord out of gratefulness of heart for all God has done for us.

[6 : 25] Let's bring our gifts, tithes, and offerings before the Lord. Thank you.

Jesus, I've forgotten the words that you have spoken.

Amen. Promises that burn within my heart have now grown dim. With the doubting heart I follow the paths of earthly wisdom.

Forgive me for my unbelief. Renew the fire again. Lord have mercy.

Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Christ have mercy.

[8 : 18] Lord have mercy. I have mercy on me. I have built an altar where I worship brings of man.

I have taken journeys that have drawn me far from you. So now I am returning to your mercies ever flowing.

Pardon my transgressions. I will be of you again. I will be of you again. I'll be of you again. Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

Lord have mercy on me. Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

Lord have mercy on me. I have longed to know you and all your tender mercies.

[9 : 58] Like a river, our rivers, that are flowing without end. So I bow my heart before you in the goodness of your presence.

Your place forever shining like a beacon in the light. Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

Lord have mercy on me. Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

Lord have mercy on me. More than mercy on me.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[11 : 40] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Dear Heavenly Father, we give you thanks and praise for this evening to gather together and worship you, to consider all that you have done for us and to offer ourselves to you this night.

We ask, Lord God, that you would bless all that we offer, financial gifts, gifts of the Spirit that you have poured out into us and all other gifts that we now lay before your feet.

[12 : 45] We ask that you would bless them. Give us wisdom to know how to best use them for the furtherance of your kingdom so that we may be a blessing wherever we go as we call many to salvation in Jesus Christ.

It is in his name that we pray. Amen. Please be seated. I am wondering this evening as we enter into our time of prayer if there are any concerns or joys that you would like to lift up this evening before the Lord.

I know we don't usually do that, but this is an unusual service each year, isn't it? So where are the joys? Where are the concerns that you would speak out before the Lord this evening?

Yes. You want to pray for your family. It's a joy to have a family, and you want to keep your family in prayer. Amen. Yes. Yes. Amen.

Prayers for healing for Amy and April, and good news that the surgeries went well and all is progressing.

[14 : 11] What other joys and concerns do we have? Yes. For your friends, friends are a joy to have, and we want to keep our friends in prayer. Amen. Amen. Amen.

What other concerns, joys? Yes, Michelle. Thank you. Margaret, who's recovering from brain surgery. Oh, dear.

Oh, my goodness. So this is your son's friend. Yes. Oh, my goodness.

So we have someone who is very ill and is in need of our prayers as he continues to deteriorate. Yes. Yes. Just got a job?

Praise God, and he's been waiting on this. That is a blessing. That is a blessing. Thank you for sharing that. Other joys, other concerns that you'd like to bring up this evening?

[15 : 15] Hey, Julaine. You have a fruit. You have all your fruits? Amen. Okay, so those of you who don't know what that means, some of the CLMs and some other folks have gotten together to do a little mini workshop retreat kind of thing coming up next month, and they were concerned that they wouldn't have enough people to do all the things that need to be done, and they have got them all.

Praise God. Amen. Other concerns or joys? Okay, well, as we turn to the Lord in prayer, you are welcome to join me.

Yes. Yes. Oh, dear. So we have the blessing of a new life, but we need some healing going on there.

Amen. Amen. All right, we will definitely keep her in our prayers. Thank you so much. With these concerns and those that are in your heart, you are welcome to join me in your seats or to come and kneel at the rail as we turn to the Lord in prayer.

Amen. Our gracious Heavenly Father, you who created all that there is, you who called your creation good, you who, when we fell into sin, continue unceasingly, relentlessly, to pursue us and draw us back to yourself.

[17 : 02] We come before you now. We are blessed for the privilege of expressing our joys to you, knowing that you rejoice with us when we rejoice, and expressing our concerns because you mourn when we mourn.

You are concerned over the things we are concerned over. You see the injustices that we see, and you desire to change things through us, your church, in this world.

We're grateful for the opportunity. We lift up now before you all those who are sick and in need of a healing touch from you. We pray in Jesus' name for all of those who are grieving losses.

We pray for their comfort and for their peace. We pray as we enter into this time of Lent that we would examine ourselves, that you would draw us into times of just seeing ourselves as you see us, both in terms of our redemption and also in terms of those things that you're still working on.

We pray that you would help us, Lord. Help us to be willing to allow the work of your Holy Spirit into our lives at a deeper level than ever before.

[18 : 41] Lord, change our hearts, O Lord. Help us to be the people you've called us to be. We ask this not for ourselves, Lord God, but so that we can be your witnesses in a dark world.

So we can bring the message of healing and mercy and grace and salvation to people who need it. Lord God, we are joyful for all the blessings we've spoken.

We are concerned for all of the concerns we've spoken. And now we're going to take a moment and lift up those that are in our hearts that have gone unspoken. Amen. Heavenly Father, be with us as we continue in worship.

Let your word wash over us and transform us as it is read. Allow the music and the sacrament, the imposition of the ashes, all of these parts of worship to be part of that change that comes into our lives.

Be with Pastor Jean as she delivers the message you have given her for us this night. May it be a blessing to her and a blessing to all of us. Lord, we ask that you make all of our worship to be a blessing to you because that is why we came.

[20 : 23] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. The word of the Lord this evening comes to us from Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church.

He writes in chapter 5, well, we call chapter 5, beginning at verse 20, we are therefore Christ's ambassadors. As though God were making his appeal through us, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's fellow workers, we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.

For he says, in the time of my favor, I heard you, and in the day of salvation, I helped you. I tell you, now is the time of God's favor.

Now is the day of salvation. We put no stumbling block in anyone's path so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God, we commend ourselves in every way, in great endurance, in troubles, in hardships and distresses, in beatings, imprisonments, and riots, in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger, in purity, understanding, patience, and kindness, in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love, in truthful speech, and in the power of God.

[22 : 21] With weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left, through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report, genuine, yet regarded as imposters, known, yet regarded as unknown, dying, and yet, we live on, beaten and yet not killed, sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, poor, yet making many rich, having nothing, yet possessing everything.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you, Pastor Lisa, for that beautiful reading.

Have any of you ever been an ambassador? An ambassador to a foreign country? I don't see any takers. Well, an ambassador is somebody, of course, who lives far away from home, in a culture that can be very different from their own.

There may be totally different customs, a different way of dressing, a different language. When I was a young adult, several years ago, I had an opportunity to go to France for a couple of weeks because my parents were over there for about three years because of my father's work, and I had a chance to go and visit them, which was quite exciting because I never thought that I would ever get to go to Europe.

But it's a little disconcerting when you go into a different country and they're speaking a whole different language and you don't know what they're saying. You walk into a room full of people and you sit down and you see them all and they look up at you and then they start talking amongst each other and you wonder what the heck they're saying about you, right?

[24 : 25] So it's a little bit different when you go to someplace else where you don't quite know the language. You can understand that sometimes even the very basis of truth of a different culture is a little different than ours.

And you can see why it might be hard for an ambassador to relate to people if they don't know the language and they might feel kind of isolated and a little bit lonely at times.

And of course, it can even be dangerous to be an ambassador to a foreign country. The people around you might be openly hostile to you, to your land, to its leaders.

It might be that your spouse and your children have to hide out in the embassy house in order to feel safe. Your life can be in danger sometimes in some places in the world because of the leader that you follow or the place that you call home.

And I was asking myself this week, is it so much different for those of us who are dedicated Christians in this post-modern or post-Christian culture?

[25 : 38] Sometimes we feel like we speak a foreign language. Sometimes we feel like we have a totally different worldview from most of the culture.

Your life can be in danger even when you're a Christian. But all of us are foreign ambassadors for the kingdom of heaven.

In fact, in Philippians 3, verse 20, it says, but our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And again, in Hebrews 11, we read about all the Old Testament saints, Abraham and Sarah and the likes, and the writer there says that all these people were still living by faith when they died.

They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they're looking for a country of their own, someplace else.

[26 : 48] We're looking for someplace else. They're longing for a better country, a heavenly home. And so God is not ashamed to be called their God because God has prepared a city for us.

We are citizens of a land that is not fully of this earth. And as Christians, we claim Jesus Christ as our Lord and as our King and heaven as our true home.

Now we have been reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ. This means we've been restored to harmony with God. Our sins are forgiven.

And now we're called to be ambassadors of Christ here on earth, encouraging other people also to be reconciled to God.

That's a big piece of who we are. We're encouraged as ambassadors to live a life that's worthy of our calling. And during the season of Lent, which leads up to the glory of Easter, it's a good time to take a look at our lives, take a look at our hearts, and see if we're being true to our calling.

[28 : 08] In 2 Thessalonians, it says it this way, with this in mind, we constantly pray for you that our God may make you worthy of his calling and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.

We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. That tells us why we're supposed to live a good life, doesn't it?

You see, as ambassadors, we represent Jesus Christ before others. People will look at us all of the time to see who is this Jesus and what exactly does it mean to be a Christian?

What are we supposed to live like? What are we supposed to do? They'll look at us and they'll see Jesus for better or for worse. They'll form an opinion of what Christ's church is by seeing what we say and seeing what we do.

Are we bringing honor to our Lord? Are we encouraging reconciliation? Are we encouraging harmony with God and with each other? And so we need to take stock from time to time and really explore who we are and how we're living.

[29 : 30] We know it won't always be easy to live by heavenly standards when we're so immersed in earthly, non-Christian culture, but it is our calling to try, to try to live up to that standard.

The Apostle Paul gave us this list in 2 Corinthians of things that had happened to him as an ambassador of Christ. Did you hear all of the things he went through? It wasn't that he was complaining or he wasn't even really bragging.

I think he was more or less warning new believers that being a true Christian isn't always the simplest thing. He tells us about the great endurance it took for him to live through all kinds of troubles and hardships and distresses that he faced.

There were times when he was beaten and left for dead. There were many times when he spent long stretches in prison, at least seven times that we know of.

And he was also a victim of mob mentality during religious riots. Did you know that the founder of our United Methodist movement, John Wesley, also faced the mob at times?

[30 : 46] He wrote about one time being dragged all the way across town by the hair on the top of his head because he was preaching the gospel in what he thought was the true way and somebody didn't like it.

He was a victim of the mob and that's happened to other ambassadors of Christ down through the ages. We know some of them were martyred. Now the normal day of the dedicated Christ follower may not be quite that difficult, but all of us will face hard work, times when we have sleepless nights, times when maybe we have to go hungry for a little bit in order to carry out the work that God has called us to do.

Sometimes we just can't attend to our own personal needs. And sometimes we will know exhaustion and discouragement as we labor for the Lord.

But God does not leave us to face these trials and these hardships alone. He equips us for the challenge if we let him.

Paul goes on to list some of those good fruit that Julaine was mentioning. He gives us some of these wonderful things as believers. He gives us purity and understanding and patience and kindness.

[32 : 07] Those are all signs of a true Christian. Do you see those things? Are they in your life and are they growing a little bit each day? I know I find myself praying for them, praying that I'll have patience and kindness and purity and understanding.

And I ask all the time that God would fill me with his Holy Spirit and with a love for others that's truly sincere. And Jesus reminds us that our spiritual fruit are what helps people recognize us as his followers when people see all of these good things happening in your life.

They know that you belong to him. Truthful speech, the power of God with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left hand. What powerful images Paul gives us of the ways that God equips us to be his ambassadors.

Paul also goes on to compare some opposites. We have what the world perceives on one side and we have what we know as Christians, heavenly citizens on the other side.

We know that we have the glory of God. We have the spirit of God living right inside of us and yet sometimes the world treats us with dishonor. Sometimes people give bad reports about us but we know that they should be giving good reports.

[33 : 31] We're genuine in our love and in our actions and yet sometimes we're regarded as imposters. You've heard people say, oh, the church is full of hypocrites. Yes, it is.

We're all that but we also have a genuine desire to love and to do what's right. We are known by God and yet sometimes we're regarded as unknown by the world.

I know some wonderful Christians who will never be recognized by the world as anything special and yet I know that they're serving God with all that they have and all that they are.

We may at times be dying at the hands of evil and yet we live on through eternal life. We may be beaten down in our spirits and in our bodies and yet nothing can kill our faith.

We might be filled with sorrow at times and yet at the same time be rejoicing. I did a funeral yesterday up in Niagara Falls and the woman had been sick for quite some time and she was in a lot of pain and she was just really miserable I have to say.

[34 : 45] Her family watched her slowly, slowly fading away and they could see her pain and when she finally passed she had this beautiful little grin on her face and all I could think is she's seeing the Lord as she's going home and so her family rejoiced in her release from her pain and in the fact that they knew that she's in God's presence now.

So there's this mixture of joy and sorrow that comes to us as believers. We may be financially poor at times sometimes we're so busy helping other people that we forget to keep some in our own pocket but it's okay because there's always a brother or sister in Christ that will help us too.

we might be poor financially and yet we know that we're making a lot of people rich through the knowledge of Christ. It may seem that we have nothing by the standards of this culture and of this world and yet we possess everything that's most important in God's kingdom.

We possess a relationship with Jesus Christ and there is nothing of more value than that. We live in this culture of contrasts don't we?

As we mature in our faith we find that the important things of this world are not always the important things of our heavenly kingdom. The influence of our cultures all around us and yet God says that we can be transformed transformed from the worldly and into the heavenly.

[36 : 25] He's made that promise to us. He says it very clearly in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. He says be reconciled to God. God made him meaning Jesus who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain for he says in the time of my favor I heard you and in the day of salvation I helped you I tell you now is the time of God's favor.

Now is the day of salvation. Now. Be reconciled to God. Now. This is the day of salvation.

We can respond to God's gift of salvation in Jesus Christ by living holy lives starting now. starting today. Starting in this season of Lent.

We can examine our hearts and our lives and draw closer to God and be wonderful ambassadors for the God who loves us and for his kingdom.

[37 : 34] Amen. I'd like to invite you to stand as we sing together Take My Life and Let It Be. Take My Life and Let It Be Concentrated Lord Take My Life Take My Life Take My Moments and My Days Take My Moments Let Them Flow Let Them Flow Let Them Flow In Ceaseless Praise Take My Hands And Let It Be

Take My Will Take My Will Take My Will Take My Will Take My Will Take My Silver Take My Silver and My Gold Take My Silver What I Will Take My Marvin Take My ■■■■ And■■■■ Mil■ Take My Will Take My Willföring Take My Will Take My Will Take My■ Shuff a hill It shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, my poor. At thy feet its treasure store. Take my soul and I will be happy, holy, all for thee.

Won't you please be seated. Sandy, I wonder if you'd come up and help me.

These ashes were made from last year's palm branches as a remembrance of God's eternal glory and grace. Shall we pray? Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth.

[40 : 32] Grant that these ashes may be to us a sign of our mortality and repentance. And may we remember it is only by your gracious gift that we are given everlasting life through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Thanks be to God. Amen. We'll be celebrating Holy Communion in a few moments. I just wanted to let you know that as you come up by the center aisles, you can receive the symbol of the ashes on your forehead or on your hand, whichever you want to ask one of us to do.

And we hope that you will take it as a symbol of your own mortality and remember what Christ has done for you. Shall we pray together our prayer of confession as we prepare for Holy Communion?

God bless you. Amen. Gracious Lord, we know that we are sinners. In need of your grace, we ask that you would forgive us for all the times we've failed and remember that we are dust.

Fill us with your spirit and help us to live lives worthy of our calling. Help us to be your ambassadors, bringing others to be reconciled to you through Christ our Lord.

[42 : 06] Amen. Hear the glorious good news. God loves us so much that he sent his son into the world to live and die and be raised again for us.

And so I can say to you with confidence, in the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. In the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Glory to God. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

[43 : 36] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[46 : 06] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[48 : 18] Thank you. Thank you. Through your Son, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, and your Holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever.

Amen. Shall we pray together the prayer that Jesus has taught us? 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 trespasses, as he forgave those who trespass against us, and give us the confidence of temptation, and deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen. Will those who are serving please come forward.

Pastor Gene, do you want to give a direction? Come and receive.

[49 : 29] Do you want ashes before you go up? Yes, you can stop here for ashes on the way. There are gluten-free elements if you need them, and we'll be having small groups come and kneel at the rail.

You'll be given the bread and the cup right there, and at Pastor Lisa's direction, you'll partake of the elements, and then you can go back to your seat so that the next group can come forward.

This is a little different than we normally do it, so pay attention. Come and receive of God's goodness and grace.

Come and receive of God's goodness and grace. Well, let's pray. Let's pray.

Thank you.

[50 : 51] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Won't you come and receive of God's goodness? Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

I'm happy.

[53 : 13] I'm happy.

I'm happy.

I'm happy.

I'm happy.

I'm happy.

[55 : 43] I'm happy.

I'm happy.

I'm happy.

I'm happy.

I'm happy. I'm happy. I'm happy. I'm happy.

[57 : 59] I'm happy. I'm happy.

I'm happy. I'm happy.

I'm happy. I'm happy.

I'm happy. I'm happy. I'm happy. I'm happy.

I'm happy. I'm happy. I want to be like Jesus. I want to be like Jesus.

[59 : 17] In my heart, in my heart, Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart.

I was thinking a little bit more about my trip to France, and I actually got so that I picked up a few important words, things like fromage, which is cheese, and merlot, which is wine, and jambon, which is ham, and frambois, which is strawberries.

I could read a little bit of the menu anyway so that I knew what I was getting. But I have to tell you, there was one dangerous moment as I was leaving the country, and it would probably be even more dangerous today as I'm walking towards the inspection station and I'm going along, tooling along, heading towards my gate.

All of a sudden, a Frenchman was yelling at me, and I didn't know what he was yelling. And finally, he said, oh, stupid American, I've got to put it in English. And he said, madame, mademoiselle, you must stop and go through the gate and be inspected.

I said, yes, sir, yes, sir, yes, sir. I mean, in today's world, I might have been tackled and thrown to the floor and shackled and dragged off. Who knows? But I was a foreigner in a strange land.

[60 : 43] And sometimes, don't you feel that way in our culture? Don't you feel as though you're a little bit strange because you're a Christian? But you know what? It's a good kind of strange. It's a good thing to be reconciled to God.

Go out this day knowing God's love for you will never die. Go out this day knowing that the grace of Jesus has reconciled you to God. Go out this day with the power of the Spirit and help to bring others into the kingdom.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.