

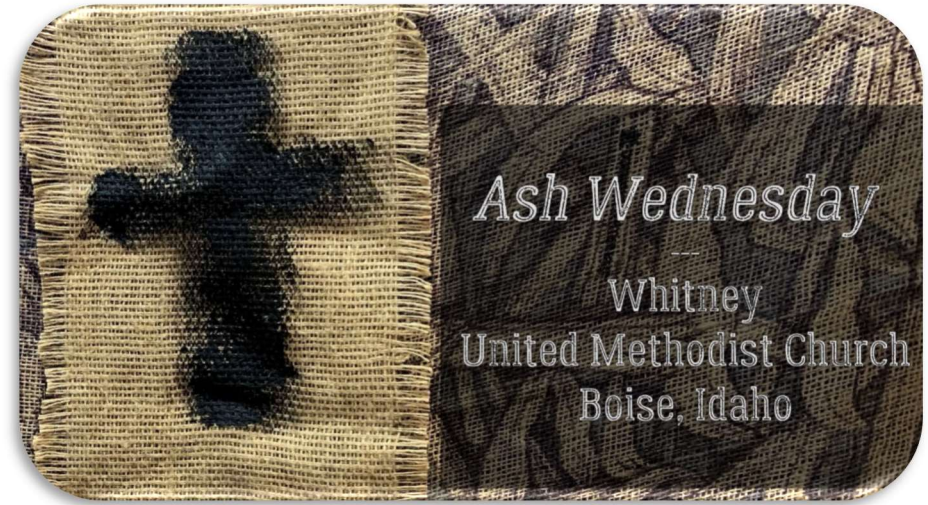
transgressions and your sin?

2. What do you need to do to observe a holy Lent?
3. Which of the four pillars feels like one that you want to work on during this season? The four pillars are
 - 1) self-examination and repentance.
 - 2) by prayer, fasting and self-denial.
 - 3) reading and meditating on God's Holy Word;
 - 4) self-sacrifice and service to others.

What one or two things can do you to work on those pillars? Options are included in your Lenten kit or you can find them on our website whitneyumc.org

You can spend as much as time in this space as you need. The music will close out this Ash Wednesday service.

May we go in peace to walk with God along this holy journey.



Rev. Christina Thompson

February 17, 2021

ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE

Welcome to our Ash Wednesday service. I invite you to get the Lenten Kit that was mailed to all church members where you will find the Lent rectangle with the black cross on it. If you are joining us and do not have that lent rectangle, that is ok. I also invite you to have a journal or paper to write on and a writing utensil.

As we begin, hear these words from Psalm 51

¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgement.
- ⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
- ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
- ¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
- ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- ¹⁶ For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
- ¹⁷ The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Repent and believe the good news of the Gospel.

The last part of this service calls us to ponder what we need out of this season of Lent. Ponder these words written by Rev. Thom Shuman.

Here, at the outer limits of Lent,
we are called to walk:
to the paper-thin edges which cut us to the soul;
to the workplaces which weary us;
to the people who confuse us;
to the faith which threatens us.

Here, at the corner of Steadfast Love and Faithfulness,
we are called to wait:
when our clenched stomachs awaken us;
in the moments of unbearable sorrow;
with the angels who would carry us.

Here, where time is fulfilled,
where God's Kingdom is as near to us
as our neighbor,
we begin Lent:
with the Beloved,
whose tears wash away our fears,
with the God who will not let go
of our hands.

~ written by Rev. Thom Shuman and posted on **Lectionary Liturgies**. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.ca/>

As we close this service, I invite you to get your journal or paper and something to write with.

We close this service with Svetlana Maddox playing Prelude in B minor by Bach arranged by Siloti. As you listen to Svetlana play, I invite you to ponder these two questions.

1. Psalm 51:3 says For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. What are your

During this season, converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism.

It was also a time when the persons who had committed serious sins and had separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness and restored to participation in the life of the church. In this way the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith. You are invited, therefore, in the name of Church and tradition, to observe a holy Lent:

by self-examination and repentance
by prayer, fasting, and self-denial, and
by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word.

To make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature, let us humble ourselves before our Creator and Redeemer.

Time of Silence

Ashes

Normally on Ash Wednesday, at this time in the service, you would come forward and I would put the mark of the cross on your forehead with the ashes made from the previous year's palm branches. Today, that is much harder to do, so instead, I invite you to pull out the Lenten Rectangle you received in the mail. If you do not have one, you can simply ponder the cross behind me.

May this cross, remind us that God has created us out of the dust of the earth. May this symbol of the ashes be to a us a sign of our mortality and penitence, so that we may remember that in God's gracious gift of Jesus, we are given full and abundant life.

As I say the following words, I invite you to make the sign of the cross either on your forehead, or on your hand.

MEDITATION ABOUT LENT

Every time I walk into our church sanctuary and see the purple overlays on the windows, I am reminded that the last time we worshipped together, we were in the season of Lent. There is other evidence as well. The hollow cross we were putting stones in, is still sitting there waiting for the rest of the stones. The stones themselves are still in the basket and the cards we were using are still sitting on the desk waiting to be used.

So, it feels a bit weird to begin this Lenten journey today – on this Ash Wednesday. Last year's Lenten journey truly felt truncated –like the end of it was cut off. Technically it wasn't. We still worshiped through Lent and made it through Holy Week to Easter. But the time that Lent usually gives us to ponder our humanity and our need for God, was usurped by a pandemic. And this year, still in a pandemic, I wonder if we all even have the energy to journey this Lent at all.

So, this year, it feels even more important to “observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word.” (From the Invitation to the Observance of Lenten Disciplines used in the Ash Wednesday Service.) I would add a fourth pieces to that—to observe a Holy Lent by self-sacrifice and service of love to others.

To even being to observe a holy Lent, we need to ponder what Lent even is.

Lent is the season of 40 days (not counting Sundays), which begins on Ash Wednesday which is today and ends on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter). The word comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lecten*, meaning “spring”.

Beyond just the facts of Lent, Lent is a journey of space and time. It is a holy time allotted to us to truly ponder who God is, who we are as human beings and our relationship with God. We often do not allow ourselves the time to truly

ponder these things and especially our own human nature. Who has time for that and who wants to ponder our human nature?

But if any year has shown us the true value and desperate need for looking deep within us, it has been this year. It is a year that has brought out the best in us and the worst in us. We have seen the human capacity for love, kindness, compassion and seeking the good of our neighbors. But we have also been confronted up close and personal with the reminder of the human capacity for hate, racism, violence and only seeking what is best for the individual, not the community.

Lent offers us the space and time to really look within ourselves to see where these two parts of humanity intercept in us. Lent offers that time to be honest about our own tendencies toward behaviors that are not kind and compassionate. Lent gives us the space to seek God's forgiveness and God's guidance on how to be a bit more like Christ in our daily living.

How do we do this? How do we observe a Holy Lent? With intention. The 40 days plus those 6 Sundays will come and go and nothing will change within us unless we are intentional about observing this holy Lent. If we are intentional about being part of this journey of time and space to look within and to see where we need God's forgiveness, we will find at the end that it was indeed a holy lent.

A couple of ways of being intentional

1. We begin that intention today. As we gather for this short Ash Wednesday service, we start that process of acknowledging our human condition and the process of realizing that we are dust and to dust we shall return.

2. Pick one of pillars of a holy Lent to work on. While you can certainly work on all four, it is also helpful to really focus on one of them. The four pillars are:
 - 1) self-examination and repentance;
 - 2) by prayer, fasting and self-denial;
 - 3) reading and meditating on God's Holy Word;
 - 4) self-sacrifice and service to others.

How do we work on those pillars?

The February newsletter had a list of options and throughout Lent, we will offer you suggestions on how to strengthen all four of them.

You will be able to find all of these on the church website -- whitneyumc.org

Pick one or more of the suggestions to do through Lent. You can choose one suggestion to do all through the season, or you can change it up and do more than one.

You also should have received in the mail, a Lenten kit that will have various options to help you observe this holy Lent.

The theme we are using during Lent is "walking the path of God." May as we intentionally take this journey, may God make us to know God's ways and may God teach us the path.

AN INVITATION TO THE OBSERVANCE OF LENTEN DISCIPLINE

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

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 before the Easter celebration there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation.