

WELCOME 2nd March 2022 – Ash Wednesday '22 C

Isaiah 58:1-14 & Proverbs 3:5-12

Good evening & Welcome to worship on this Ash Wednesday!

Quick reminder: We're still doing things we need to maintain a level of safety: Hand sanitizer. Masks optional but encouraged. Communion. Thanks set-up & clean-up folks!

"You're Invited!" A personal invitation bubbles w/ excitement. A new place or a new experience to challenge or delight us. Usually it's something thrilling & we can't wait to go there...birthday, wedding, anniversary.

"Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Shout aloud! Don't be timid. Tell my people of their sins!" I'm tempted to give that sort of invitation a miss...sorry I've got something else on...wash my hair... long-service leave...isolation... yeah that's it...iso!

But this Lent, Jesus invites you to accept that invitation...to allow His Word to confront the sin that clings to us like gum to our shoes...a blister on our foot...to allow God's Spirit to cleanse & rescue & rebuild our hearts in patient love...for his purpose for good. **My child, don't reject the Lord's discipline, and don't be upset when he corrects you. For the Lord corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.**

Far from an angry impulsive malicious back-of-the-hand...the Father's discipline brings wholeness & restores life...the Father's correction saves from danger & death. Lent is an invitation to allow our hearts to be changed & our lives shaped as we are given power & authority to invite others to join us on the way of Jesus. The invitation is open... How will you respond to God's invitation?

Please stand as we sing...

Heavenly Father you have spoken to us saying *"Turn to me with your whole heart; with fasting, with weeping, & with mourning. Rend your hearts not your garments"* We turn to you now seeking forgiveness & restoration – longing for healing & hope – searching for meaning & purpose in our lives & the lives of those we love. By your Son deliver us from the power of the evil one. Save us from sin & death. Breathe new life into us & strengthen our wills to surrender our lives solely to you.

Gracious God you lovingly created a world of life & beauty, a world of wonder & mystery. Teach us to honour & respect your creation. Cause our eyes to see you at work in & through all that you have made. Wean us from continuous wasteful consumption. Create in us wisdom to manage wisely all that you have given to us. Make us generous stewards of your bounty, not pirates drunk with privilege & pleasure. Bless our gifts so they may be a multiplied blessing to your world.

Lord you have placed us in community & bid us to live in peace. Nurture our leaders to seek after your will above all else. Cause them to seek righteousness & peace, truth & justice. Work through the mechanisms of gov't to enable the good of all. Protect us from leaders who seek their own selfish ends & from those who would tear down leaders for the sake of watching them fall.

Father we pray this night for those close to us. We lift to you those in our homes & those we carry in our hearts. You know the needs before they are known to us. Open the storehouses of your mercy & bless the sick & sorrowful. Touch with your hand of love & healing those who are under the care of doctors, nurses, & therapists or who know pain as a constant companion. Give comfort & peace to those to whom death draws near....Hear now our silent requests.....

Heavenly Father your Son Jesus came to this world to bring light & immortality to life. You sent Him as a bearer of joy & hope. Your Word speaks our name & calls us into life in its fullest measure. Speak to us today & always in our moments of joy & triumph. Rejoice with us in our celebrations. Pour out your Spirit upon us that we may experience & share with those around us the life you desire for all your children.

Above all things Lord draw us close to your heart. This day & every day may we know the full power of your Holy Spirit & the compassionate strength of your grace...Through Jesus Christ we pray...Amen

ASH WEDNESDAY '22 C – RSVP: INVITATION TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Repent!” Most of are old enough to have seen someone like that...holding a sign a bullhorn raging about sin & evil in the world. Threatening God’s wrath. Insisting that some fiery doom is just around the corner...it’s an effort to frighten us into a response resembling faith... “Turn or burn buddy!” I grew up in Tx around all manner of tent-revivalists & hell-fire evangelists...

It’s easy to look at Lent that way...or at least Ash Wednesday...**“You** *are dust and to dust you shall return.*” There’s no way to sugarcoat that one. We know precisely what the prophets all said...Sin corrupts everything. Sin distorts everything. Sin...our in-born insistence that we are god-for-ourselves that we direct the music for our own lives that we are the boss of us & anyone else standing close by...contaminates all we are...not just what we do but the very fabric of our lives is warped & stained.

Sin not only taints our very worst but it rots us in our very best...even religious behaviour...**Yet** *they act so pious! They come to the Temple every day & seem delighted to learn all about me. They act like a righteous nation that would never abandon the laws of its God. They ask me to take action on their behalf, pretending they want to be near me.* The only person who’s fooled by that is...us. And it kills us. Sin is a poison woven into the sinews of human flesh...It’s deeper than our DNA. And it kills us. Death is an enemy that stalks every step...waits to steal our very breath. I was listening to an evolutionary biologist this week describe how we need technology to help us get beyond the boundaries of human biology because biology ends in death.

He was asking Paul’s old question, **“Oh,** *what a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me from this life dominated by sin & death?* His answer was technology – science. He knows...he doesn’t understand but he knows...If he’s depending on his own stamina strength & resources to live forever...*he is dust & to dust he shall return.* He’s looking for a saviour...science/technology! He’s as afraid as any knee-shaking convert under the thunder of a hell-fire evangelist/tub-thumping revivalist.

What does that mean for you & me? Well...sometimes you need one Scripture to help you understand another...So here you go...the Holy Spirit caught me completely off guard this week...reading Lk 13...Jesus has set his face to Jerusalem where he knows what’s waiting & he’s told about the brutality & tragedy of our sin-broken world & he simply notes, **“Unless** *you repent you too will perish.*” This life will end...in great pain or in complete serenity but unless our lives find a different direction & new course...dust. Then he grieves the persistent hard-hearted unrepentance of God’s people...**“Jerusalem,** *Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets & stones God’s*

messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me. Now, look, your house is abandoned & desolate.” It hit me...that’s repentance...allowing our lives to be gathered away from danger/death into the protective saving presence & power of Jesus. Not a fear-driven cowering beneath the raised fist of God, but being gathered alongside the One who will give his life so we can live forever. Repentance is about being drawn from danger to rescue...from alone to community...from certain dust to life in God’s kingdom.

Once I heard **that** word...there was this word: **Then** Repentance – having our hearts & lives re-oriented according to God’s desire to save – to rescue restore set free opens us to **THEN**...**“Then** *your salvation will come like the dawn, & your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, & the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the Lord will answer. ‘Yes, I am here,’ he will quickly reply.*

Then *your light will shine out from the darkness, & the darkness around you will be as bright as noon. Then the Lord will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry & restoring your strength. Then you will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. Then some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as a builder of walls & a restorer of homes.*

Then *you will have healing for your body & strength for your bones...Then he will fill your barns with grain, & your vats will overflow with good wine.*

Then *the Lord will be your delight. I will give you great honour & satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor Jacob. I, the Lord, have spoken!”*

The Father longs to forgive – to welcome home - heal & restore. The Father takes no joy in the child he made for his love living & dying distant from him. The Father has no pleasure in the death/destruction of the rebellious whom he created to live in his presence. The Father delights in showing mercy. The Father rejoices in forgiveness. The Father pursues us not w/ the whip hand but w/ love that is relentless & persistent & unyielding...And is seen most clearly in the Son who suffered & died for us & whose resurrection claims us as his own.

Jesus invites you to accept that invitation...to allow His Word to confront the sin that still clings & binds...to allow God’s Spirit to cleanse & rescue & rebuild your heart in patient love...for his purpose for good. The Father longs for his abundant grace to wash over & through us...to draw us deeper into the refuge of his strength that alone destroys the grave. Defeats sin. Banishes the evil one. The Father’s discipline brings wholeness...restores life. The Father’s correction saves from danger & death. Lent is an invitation to allow our hearts to be changed & our lives shaped as we are given power & authority to invite others to join us on the way of Jesus. The invitation is open...