

Ash Wednesday Combined Service Albany Presbytery

February 17, 2021

Worship Leadership from New Scotland Presbyterian Church, Delmar Presbyterian Church; Schoharie United Presbyterian Church; Schoharie Reformed Church; Westminster Presbyterian Church; Northville United Presbyterian Church; Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church; First United Presbyterian Church of Troy; and Hebron United Presbyterian Church

Introduction

The Rev. Holly Cameron

This year, eight of our churches in Albany Presbytery, plus Schoharie Reformed Church, are joining together for this special recorded service for Ash Wednesday. Because we will be worshipping from our homes, you are invited to have ashes or oil or water to make the mark of the cross on your forehead or the back of your hand.

Ashes are a traditional symbol of repentance and a reminder of our mortality - if you have a fireplace you may have ashes easily available, you might also consider using dirt (be sure if you have potting soil that it does not contain fertilizer or other chemicals that are not meant to be put on your skin), or something else that would make a smudge.

Oil and water are also important symbols of our faith, so if you do not have ashes, you may use some kind of baby oil, mineral oil, or olive oil to make the mark of the cross. Or you could use water. Our worship service will focus on how each of these symbols is part of our faith journey.

The service also includes the Lord's Supper, so you may want to have some kind of bread or cracker or chip, and some kind of drink, juice or wine or water, to participate in that part of the service.

Prelude

Carol Scott, Delmar

"All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night"

Welcome

All Presbyterian Pastors

Gathering

Call to Worship

The Rev. Andrea Holroyd, The Rev. Dr. Sherri Meyer-Veen and the Rev. Mike Meyer-Veen

We come to worship God as the Lenten season begins, aware of our frailty and our failings.

We come seeking God's mercy, acknowledging our mortality.

Having received the waters of baptism,

We come to be marked now with ashes, with oil, or with water.

May we humble ourselves before God now with a yoke of burden

But a mantle of freedom in Jesus' name.

Prayer of the Day, a Prayer of Releasing

The Rev. Laura Mitchell

Holy, holy, holy God, we place ourselves in your presence; we rest in the promise of your grace. Our minds and our spirits are cluttered with many thoughts and feelings that threaten to pull our attention away from you. Let us unclench our fists and release these things:

We release all that we have done today—whether for good or for ill.

We release all that we feel like we should have done today, but did not do.

We release all that we need to do tomorrow.

We release our fear... We release our anxiety...

We release our impatience... We release our pride.

All of the thoughts, all of the feelings that pull us away from you, O God, we release.

Fill us now with the joy and the peace of your deep, abiding presence. We offer all of ourselves to you, our One God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. (silence) Amen.

Hymn The Rev. Andrea Holroyd, the Rev. Mike Meyer-Veen, Susan Bramer
“When the Poor Ones (Cuando el pobre)” NOTE: Hymn lyrics on last few pages

The Word

Prayer for Illumination The Rev. Amanda Wagner
Merciful God, your word is our way of truth and life. Create in us hearts that are clean and put your Holy Spirit within us, so that we may receive your grace and declare your praise forever. Amen.

Epistle Reading from 2 Corinthians 5 The Rev. Holly Cameron
We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made himself to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Meditation on Water The Rev. Karen Pollan
Every journey has a beginning, a first step. Ash Wednesday is the first step of the season of lent. This journey moves us from darkness and death towards new life. Lent is a yearly journey that is always different. On this journey we contemplate our humanity and our brokenness and seek the renewal of a deeper relationship with God.

This journey begins with a mark – to remind us of whose we are and to remind us of our ultimate destination. The usual sign is ashes, but water also makes a fine mark.

It is said that life began in primordial oceans.

In the very first verses of our sacred texts a wind from God swept over the waters – at the very beginning of creation’s story.

The children of Israel left slavery behind and embraced freedom by passing through the waters of the Red Sea.

Jesus began his public ministry standing in the muddy Jordan River, water flowing over his head, dripping of his beard.

We enter the church by baptism – a sign made with this elemental medium. Baptism marks us as God’s own and reminds us that our story is part of the divine story - part of the blessed stream generated by the very wind of God sweeping over the waters at the moment of creation.

We began the last season of Lent in another world. We have been living through a chaotic time and the forces beyond our control are frightening indeed. Perhaps marking yourself with water as you begin this year’s journey through Lent can be a reminder of God’s creative power, a reminder that the Spirit which hovered over the deep at creation – is still present, hovering and able to re-create us in this season of renewal.

Hymn for Reflection The Rev. Andrea Holroyd
“Sign Us With Ashes,” verse 1 NOTE: Hymn Lyrics on last few pages

Gospel Reading from Matthew 6 The Rev. Rebecca Lawson Putman
Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Meditation on Oil

The Rev. Janice West

She wasted it all. When the nameless woman broke the alabaster jar of expensive perfume, and poured the oil out upon our Lord, she wasted both the oil, and the jar – which was now broken and unable to be used for its purpose again. At least that is what the disciples said. When she allowed the oil to wash over our Lord, and she washed his feet using her hair, she was anointing him for his death. She knew. She understood. And as the oil flowed out, our Lord let her continue to do what she was doing. . .preparing his body for its ultimate purpose.

And so we come tonight, aware that our time on earth is limited. We come, remembering the phrase we would say any other year – you are dust and to dust you shall return – and know that anointing with ashes and oil both remind us of how we are changed to a new life in Christ. It is appropriate to start these forty days of Lent with this in mind.

Hymn for Reflection

The Rev. Andrea Holroyd

“Sign Us With Ashes,” verses 2, 3 NOTE: Hymn Lyrics on last few pages

Old Testament Reading from Isaiah 58

The Rev. Laura Mitchell

Announce to my people their rebellion,

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

Meditation on Ashes

The Rev. Heather Kirk-Davidoff with her daughter, Rosa

Heather talks with her daughter, Rosa, who is a senior in college, majoring in Environmental Studies. Rosa worked for a summer in Montana doing fire ecology research and studied seedlings and other plants growing out of the ash from recent forest fires. There was a lot of ash in those areas. We think of ash as a sign that things have been destroyed, but Rosa observed that fire was part of the life cycle of the forest. Plants were growing through the ash and some of those plants come alive only because of the extreme heat of a fire. It has taken scientists a while to realize that fire is a regenerative force, giving the forest a fresh start, and allowing some plants to come alive. The fire actually opens up space for a new generation of plants and trees to thrive.

In the Hebrew scriptures a sign of repentance is to cover oneself in sackcloth and ash. In this case, ash is a symbol that things are not okay. But in the forest we see that after a fire, even in the ash, new life is coming. And the ash actually allows the new life to generate. So, ash is not just a symbol of things being over, but is a symbol of things being renewed. The ash enables the new life to come. Ashes are not just about things that are ended, but about renewal.

Rosa got a tattoo of a Lodgepole Pine seedling, one of the first trees that come back after a forest fire, and one whose seeds can only be opened by the high heat associated with a wildfire. For her it is a symbol of something good coming out of something bad.

That's a good symbol for us to remember on Ash Wednesday and as we approach the season of Lent: when we are faced with things ending and letting go, there is also a way that creates room for new life and new growth. May it be true for our souls, as well.

Hymn for Reflection

The Rev. Andrea Holroyd

"Sign Us With Ashes," verses 4, 5, 6 NOTE: Hymn Lyrics on last few pages

Invitation to the Observance of the Lenten Discipline

The Rev. Holly Cameron

Friends in Christ, every year at the time of the Christian Passover we celebrate our redemption through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lent is a time to prepare for this celebration and to renew our life in the paschal mystery. We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance, and for the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We begin our journey to Easter with the signs of ashes, oil, and water. These signs speak to us of the frailty and uncertainty of human life, and of the claim God has made on our lives. We begin this season as a community in penitence. I invite you, therefore, in the name of Christ, to observe a holy Lent by self-examination and penitence, by prayer and fasting, by works of love, and by reading and meditating on the Word of God. Let us bow before God, our Creator and Redeemer, in a time of confession.

Psalms 51 - A Prayer of Personal Repentance

All Pastors

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

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

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 judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt-offerings and whole burnt-offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Litany of Penitence - A Prayer of Communal Repentance

The Revs. Laura Mitchell & Andrea Holroyd

One: Now we come to a time of communal repentance. We will read the litany, and you are invited to join in saying the words that appear on your screen. Let us pray.

All: Holy and merciful God, we confess to you and to one another, and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth, that we have sinned by our own fault in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

One: We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven.

All: Have mercy on us, O God.

One: We have not listened to your call to serve as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit.

All: Have mercy on us, O God.

One: We confess to you, O God, all our past unfaithfulness: For the pride, hypocrisy, and impatience in our lives,

All: have mercy on us, O God.

One: For our self-indulgent appetites and ways and our exploitation of other people,

All: have mercy on us, O God.

One: For our anger at our own frustration and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,

All: have mercy on us, O God.

One: For our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work,

All: have mercy on us, O God.

One: For our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,

All: have mercy on us, O God.

One: Accept our repentance, O God, for the wrongs we have done. For our neglect of human need and suffering and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,

All: have mercy on us, O God.

One: For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us,

All: have mercy on us, O God.

One: For our waste and pollution of your creation and our lack of concern for those who come after us,

All: have mercy on us, O God.

One: Restore us, O God of our salvation, and show us your steadfast love.

All: Turn to us in your mercy and redeem us.

Anthem

"Lighten our Darkness"

Al Fedak, Westminster

Imposition of Ashes or Oil or Water

The Rev. Amanda Wagner

As we prepare to receive the ashes, we are reminded that they are dust. And we have been created from the dust of the earth. So ashes are a reminder to us of our mortality. Oil reminds us that we belong to God, and God anoints us to do God's ministry in this world. Water is the very essence of life; we are baptized with water asking the Spirit to flow within us and with the intention of following in Jesus' way.

Today, as we receive ashes, oil, or water, we are reminded that it is only by the grace of God that we are given life – both this life, and the life everlasting.

You are invited now to dip your finger in your ashes, oil, or water, and make the sign of the cross on your forehead, or on the back of your hand. If you are worshiping with others, you may make this sign on each other.

Then say: **I have put on Christ. Christ be with me.**

You have put on Christ. Christ be with you.

Prayer

The Rev. Janice West

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth, and in the waters of baptism, the Holy Spirit marks us for service in Christ. With oil we are anointed for the work of faith. Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation, that we may show forth your glory in the world. By the cross and passion of our Savior, bring us with all your saints to the joy of Christ's resurrection. Amen.

Anthem

New Scotland Choir

"Dust and Ashes"

The Eucharist

Invitation to the Lord's Table

The Rev. Laura Mitchell

Hear the gracious words of our Savior Jesus Christ: 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 lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Revs. Karen Pollan, Andrea Holroyd, Holly Cameron, Heather Kirk-Davidoff

May the Lord be with you, as we lift up our hearts and give thanks to the Lord our God. Let us pray. It is truly right and our great joy to give you thanks and praise, eternal God, creator and ruler of the universe.

You are our God, and we are the creatures of your hand. You made us from the dust of the earth, breathed into us the breath of life, and set us in your world to love and serve you. When we rejected your love and ignored your wisdom, you did not reject us. You loved us still and called us to turn again to you in obedience and in love.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with the heavenly choirs and will all the faithful of every time and place, who forever sing to the glory of your name:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

The Prayer Continues...

The Rev. Andrea Holroyd, The Rev. Dr. Sherri Meyer-Veen and the Rev. Mike Meyer-Veen

You are holy, O God of majesty, and blessed in Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord.

Out of your great love for the world, you sent Jesus among us to set us free from the tyranny of evil. He lived as one of us, sharing our joys and sorrows. By his dying and rising, he releases us from bondage to sin and frees us from the dominion of death.

Remembering all your mighty and merciful acts, we take this bread and this cup from the gifts you have given us and celebrate with joy the redemption won for us in Jesus Christ. Accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving as a living and holy offering of ourselves, that our lives may proclaim the One crucified and risen.

Memorial Acclamation

The Rev. Holly Cameron

Great is the mystery of faith: **Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.**

The Prayer Continues...

The Rev. Heather Kirk-Davidoff

Gracious God, pour your Holy Spirit upon us, and upon these your gifts of the bread and cup, that the bread we break and cup we bless may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ. By your Spirit unite us with the living Christ and with all who are baptized in his name,

that we may be one in ministry in every place. As this bread is Christ's body for us, send us out to the body of Christ in the world.

Lead us, O God, by the power of your Spirit to live as the Lord requires: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with you, our God. Keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ until this mortal life is ended, and all that is earthly returns to dust. Give us strength to serve you faithfully until the promised day of resurrection, when with the redeemed of all the ages, we will feast with you at your table in glory. Through Christ, all glory and honor are yours, almighty God, with the Holy Spirit in the holy church, now and forever. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

The Rev. Janice West

Let us pray for God's rule on earth as Jesus 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 debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and power, and glory, forever. Amen.

Words of Institution

The Rev. Rebecca Lawson Putman

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

{Each pastor is standing at their communion table and breaks the bread their bread.}

In the same way he took the cup, saying: This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you, and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

{Each pastor is standing at their communion table and holds the cup.}

Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the saving death of the risen Lord, until he comes. Take and eat, the bread of heaven, and the cup of new life.

Communion Reflection

Al Fedak, Westminster

"Thou Turnest Man, O Lord, to Dust"

Communion Prayer

The Rev. Amanda Wagner

God of compassion, through your Son Jesus Christ you reconciled your people to yourself. Following his example of prayer and fasting, may we obey you with willing hearts and serve one another in holy love; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sending

Hymn

New Scotland Choir

"Ash Wednesday Comes and, Lord, We Hear"

Benediction

The Rev. Holly Cameron

From dust we come, to dust we will return. We have gathered in penitence, and worshipped in confidence. At the beginning of Lent, at every moment of our lives, we belong to God. We belong to God. We belong to God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Postlude

Carol Scott, Delmar

"I Want Jesus to Walk with Me"

Hymn Lyrics

“When the Poor Ones (Cuando el pobre)” #762 in the Glory to God Hymnal

*Cuando el pobre nada tiene y aún reparte,
cuando un hombre pasa sed y agua nos da,
cuando el débil a su hermano fortalece,
va Dios mismo en nuestro mismo caminar.
Va Dios mismo en nuestro mismo caminar.*

When the poor ones who have nothing share with strangers, when the thirsty water give unto us all, when the crippled in their weakness strengthen others, then we know that God still goes that road with us, then we know that God still goes that road with us.

*Cuando abunda el bien y llena los hogares,
cuando un hombre donde hay guerra pone paz,
cuando “hermano” le llamamos al extraño,
va Dios mismo en nuestro mismo caminar.
Va Dios mismo en nuestro mismo caminar.*

When our homes are filled with goodness in abundance, when we learn how to make peace instead of war, when each stranger that we meet is called a neighbor, then we know that God still goes that road with us, then we know that God still goes that road with us.

“Ash Wednesday Comes and, Lord, We Hear” by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette
Tune: Tallis’ Canon (“All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night”)

Ash Wednesday comes, and Lord, we hear
The word for which our spirits yearn;
Amid this world's distress and fear,
We hear your loving call: "Return!"

"Return to me with all your heart"
With fasting, weeping, mourning, too.
O God, we seek a brand new start,
A new beginning here with you.

You call to us — the old, the young;
You summon nations strong and weak.
When we have drifted toward the wrong,
You call us back, your way to seek.

O God most merciful and kind,
Your love is not a prize we earn;
Yet in our life with you we find
The joy that comes when we return.

Hymn Lyrics

“Sign Us With Ashes,” #433 in the Glory to God Hymnal

Surely, you alone can save us. You pay our price with precious blood.
Reaching through your great compassion, you lift up your people with love.

Sign us with ashes, merciful God, children of dust, as to dust we return.
Sign us with ashes, merciful God. Mark us and make us your own.

Surely, you alone uphold us. You give us strength for all our needs.
Shielding with a father’s favor, you bless us with pardon and peace.

Surely, you alone can heal us. Yours is the will to make us whole.
Soothing with a mother’s kindness, the contrite of heart, you console.

Sign us with ashes, merciful God, children of dust, as to dust we return.
Sign us with ashes, merciful God. Mark us and make us your own.

Surely, you alone can free us. You break the bonds of guilt and sin.
Bracing, till we walk uprightly, you bolster our hope once again.

Surely, you alone refine us. You give us grace for lives made new, forging, through your fire
and radiance, a sacrifice worthy for you.

Surely, you alone redeem us. You fill our dust with holy breath.
Bursting from the grave in glory, you rise from the ashes of death!

Sign us with ashes, merciful God, children of dust, as to dust we return.
Sign us with ashes, merciful God. Mark us and make us your own.

Thanks to all the participants in this service!

The Clergy:

The Rev. Janice West, Interim Pastor, Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Amanda Wagner, Pastor, First United Presbyterian Church of Troy
The Rev. Rebecca Lawson Putman, Pastor, Northville United Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Karen Pollan, Pastor, Delmar Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Laura Mitchell, Pastor, Hebron United Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Pastor, Westminster Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Holly Cameron, Pastor, New Scotland Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Andrea Holroyd, Pastor, Schoharie United Presbyterian Church
joining Andrea are The Rev. Dr. Sherri Meyer-Veen & The Rev. Mike Meyer-Veen,
Co-Pastors, Schoharie Reformed Church

The Musicians:

Carol Scott, Delmar Presbyterian Church
Susan Bramer, Schoharie United Presbyterian Church
Al Fedak, Westminster Presbyterian Church
Ryan Dwyer, John Griffin, and Brenda Dwyer, New Scotland Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Andrea Holroyd, Pastor, Schoharie United Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Mike Meyer-Veen, Co-Pastor, Schoharie Reformed Church

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