

First Congregational United Church of Christ
"Where No One Is a Stranger"
515-295-2845
February 14, 2024

ASH WEDNESDAY WORSHIP

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We gather in the dimness of evening

Many: to be with the God who brightens the shadows of our lives.

One: We gather in the quiet of this place,

Many: to be with Jesus, knowing that nothing past, present, or future separates us.

One: We gather to be marked as disciples,

Many: to be fed for the journey through Lent, to be sealed by the Spirit as God's own.

OPENING SONG: "Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days" #252

OPENING PRAYER

You wait on this evening, Patient God, for us to come back: to stop going away from you on our self-focused travels; to set aside our empty fears; to cease shaping you in our image, so we can discover you closer than we ever dare imagined.

You wait for us this night, Companion of our hearts, for us to follow once more: leaving the shuttered corners of our lives; refusing to go from one failed promise to another; coming out of the panic rooms we have built in our souls, so you can take us by the hand to lead us to resurrection life.

You wait in scattered ashes of our lives, Spirit of silence, for us to find you: in our sisters and brothers who are willing to hold us up when we falter, so you can embrace us with joy and hope in every moment.

As you wait, and as we seek to return to you in these moments, we pray as we are taught...Our Father.....

FOCUS SCRIPTURE: Mark 8:34-36 read from the *Common English Bible*

A BRIEF MEDIATION

"Say No!"

CALL TO CONFESSION

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We have trouble telling the truth, God of broken hearts, yet we must admit on this night how we have trouble being your people. We may not trample the poor, but we sometimes walk right past them. We don't receive bribes, but we are more privileged than many around us. We trust more in ourselves than in you, and spend far too much time patting ourselves on the back, rather than holding out a hand to others.

Where can we go for forgiveness but to you, God of the ashes? When we are greedy, you promise to be gracious. When we have trouble confronting injustice, you stand at our side. When we struggle to seek good, you point us to Jesus, our Brother, our Savior, who shows us how to turn our back on evil to follow him. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

One: God refuses to stand far off, but comes close to us – to hear our prayers, to touch our hearts with forgiveness, and to walk with us during this holy season and beyond.

Many: We have no need to go anyplace else, but into the comforting and restoring heart of the One who loves us. Thanks be to God. We are forgiven. Amen.

INVITATION TO THE LENTEN LIFE

One: Not for the first time, yet fresh once more,

Many: we accompany Jesus to Jerusalem.

One: Because of his experience in the wilderness,

Many: we discover how we might have the strength to turn our back on evil, so we can choose good.

One: By his example of fasting and prayer, in the midst of serving and caring for others,

Many: we can learn that rhythm of faithful living which allows us to work for justice and hope,

as we draw strength from the timeless acts, of silence, feasting on the word, and prayer.

One: As we remember our baptism into faith,

Many: we are marked as Christ's own and prepare ourselves to come to God, on this holy night.

THE CEREMONY OF ASHES

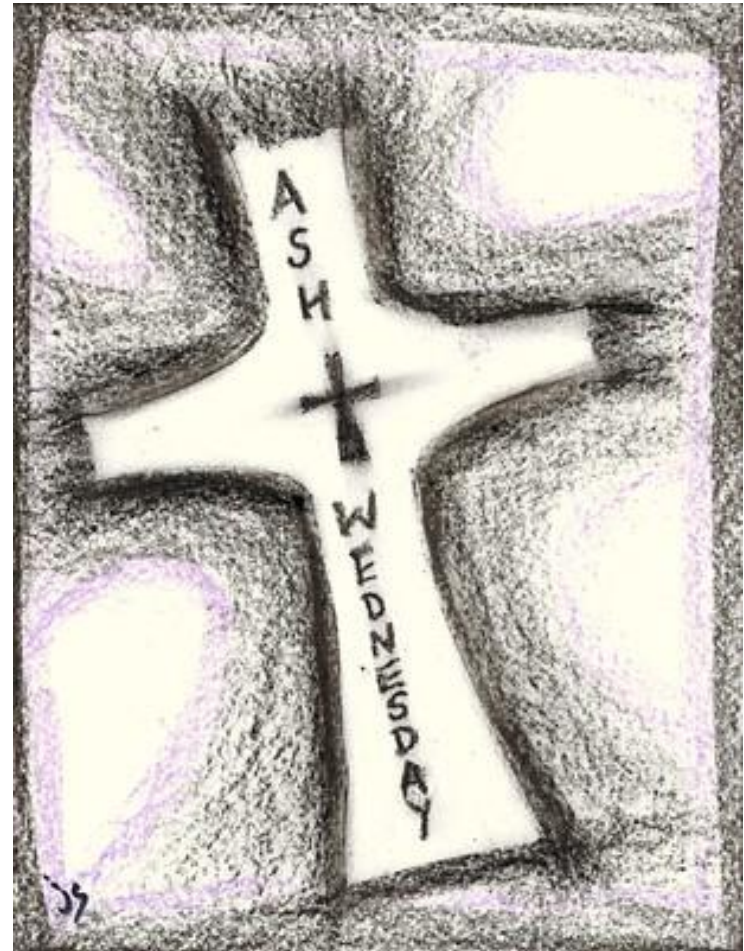
CLOSING SONG "O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee" #589

BENEDICTION

One: Go from this time of worship alert to the leadings and illuminations of God. Take the path that directs you toward Jesus.

Many: May our companion on this journey of faith be a daring and sustaining Spirit!

The Call to Worship, Opening Prayer (adapted), Call to Confession, Prayer of Confession, Words of Assurance, and Invitation to the Lenten Life (adapted) are from *Lectionary Liturgies* by Thom M. Shuman. The Benediction (adapted) is from *Words of Worship-Resources for Church and Home* by Glen E. Rainsley



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