

## Ash Wednesday

February 17, 2021

### Lectionary Passages:

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Psalm 51:1-17

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21



### Selected Verses:

“Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.” Joel 2: 12-13

“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.  
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Psalm 51: 9-10, 17

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6: 19-21

### Devotional:

Today is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. The season of Lent lasts 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Holy Saturday (the day before Easter). The six Sundays are “in” Lent and not “of” Lent because each Sunday we celebrate the resurrection and worship the Lord. Lent is a season of 40 days to remind us of the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness (Matthew 4: 1-11; Mark 1:12 and Luke 4: 1-13). As Jesus spent time in solitude and fasting before he started his public ministry, we are reminded to spend time in prayer, repentance and fasting before we celebrate the Easter Sunday and the new calling as redeemed children of God.

Over the next 40 days, I am planning on writing daily devotionals. These will be a bit different from last year. Instead of writing on all three passages from the lectionary, I will be writing one devotional on the daily theme. I will provide the lectionary passages so that you may read the entire passages. I will also include a few key verses that speak to the theme. It is my hope that as we journey through Lent, we will continue in our journey as faithful followers of Jesus Christ our Lord.

When we turn Lent, we often think about “giving something up for Lent” or receiving the ashes of Ash Wednesday. A story of often share is from my freshman year in college. My roommate put salt on almost everything even before taking a bite. For me, it was ketchup. So, for

Lent we challenged each other to give up salt and ketchup. On Easter Monday, foodservice had hamburgers and french fries. Drew poured salt on them, I pour ketchup. After one bite, we both put our trays on rack for cleaning and got another plate of food. I seldom eat ketchup to this day. Yet, when it comes to Lent, God wants more than us giving up one thing for 40 days, or having ashes on our foreheads.

The idea of giving something up comes from fasting. When we fast, we abstain from something for a short period of time. Some people abstain from certain foods, activities, media, habits or comforts. Before talking about what fasting is, today's passages give us a warning about fasting. All too often, we fast for the wrong reason or with the wrong attitude.

First, Lent and fasting is not about appearances. In the passages above, God warns the people that it is not the outward appearance that matters, but the inward conviction. God wants a clean heart, a contrite heart, a broken spirit. A broken spirit is one that realizes they have done wrong and seeks forgiveness. It is a spirit of humility, seeking to repair the relationship that they broke. Lent is a season of realizing the places that we have broken relationship with God, and seeking to have a right relationship.

Instead, Lent and fasting is about allowing space to build the relationship with God. We abstain from foods or drinking to allow our body to realize that we "do not live by bread alone." We abstain from television, radio or the computer to allow space for listening to God. We abstain from habits or comforts in order to give God our undivided attention. Whenever we abstain from something, it is to allow us to partner with God to live a life as His children.

This Lenten season, I invite you to store up your treasures in heaven. To have your heart not set on the things of this world that will not last, but have a clean heart set on what will last, a relationship with Jesus Christ. I pray that you will journey with me through Lent.

Prayer:

(from Psalm 51 select verses)

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Cleanse me and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. In Jesus' name, Amen.