

THE CROSS

I am the cross.
I am the symbol
of the vicarious
suffering of Jesus
Christ. I am the
emblem of God's
costly love in seek-
ing to save human-
ity sin. I am Christ's

final acceptance of and submission to the will of the Father. I am a demonstration of the utter iniquity and moral perversity of sin. I am the burden of sorrow and suffering which sin places upon those who share Christ's passion to rid the world of sin.

I am the God-given assurance of the ultimate victory over sin.

I can become
a source of com-
fort, resignation
and fortitude for
those who are the
victims of aggressive
evil. I demonstrate
the possibility of
man's willingness
to give his life for
the welfare of
others. I give draw-
ing power to the
gospel. I am the
utmost effort of
evil to frustrate
God's plan of re-
demption. I justify
the attitudes of
gratitude, loyal

devotion, and worship toward Jesus Christ.

I am the turning point in the religious history
of mankind. I provide away by which those who
have been guilty of wrong-doing may establish fellowship with the God
of righteousness.

Norman E. Richardson

Black River Falls United Methodist Church

Ash Wednesday
February 18, 2026 7 PM

CALL TO WORSHIP

Praise God, who has taught us to sing.

Praise God, who has gathered us together.

We come before God to begin again,

To renew our hearts and our spirits.

Be assured that God's steadfast love surrounds us and upholds us.

Thanks be to God.

HYMN

Would I Have Answered When You Called

#2137

UNISON PRAYER

**Most Holy God,
your Son came to save sinners,
we come to this season of repentance
confessing our unworthiness,
asking for new and honest hearts,
and the healing power of your forgiveness.
You son is Word: your full revelation of love,
the Light that darkness cannot extinguish,
and the Life: the abundant relationship with you
May we grow to be like him. Amen.**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of love and grace, we come to you with our hearts wide open
There are times when our hearts reject your love;
times when we go against your ways;
times when we display an unfaithful attitude.
Forgive us,
Remind us of your steadfast love
And put a new spirit within us.
In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

GOSPEL READING

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be
seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in

heaven.

²“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

⁵“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ...

¹⁶“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

HYMN

I Surrender All

#354

DEVOTION

Rev. Inwha Shon

PASTOR'S INVITATION TO A HOLY LENT

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Christians have always observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection. It became the custom of the Church to prepare for Easter by a season of penitence, fasting, and prayer. This season of forty days provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for baptism into the body of Christ. It is also the time when persons who had committed serious sins and had been separated from the community of believers were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the church.

Psalm 38, NLT

O LORD, don't rebuke me in your anger! Don't discipline me in your rage!

Your arrows have struck deep, and your blows are crushing me. Because of your anger, my whole body is sick; my health is broken because of my sins.

My guilt overwhelms me -- it is a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and stink because of my foolish sins. I am bent over and racked with pain. My days are filled with grief. A raging fever burns within me, and my health is broken. I am exhausted and completely crushed. My groans come from an anguished heart.

You know what I long for, LORD; you hear my every sigh. My heart beats wildly, my strength fails, and I am going blind. My loved ones and friends stay away, fearing my disease. Even my own family stands at a distance. Meanwhile, my enemies lay traps for me; they make plans to ruin me. They think up treacherous deeds all day long. But I am deaf to all their threats. I am silent before them as one who cannot speak.

I choose to hear nothing, and I make no reply. For I am waiting for you, O LORD. You must answer for me, O LORD my God.

I prayed, "Don't let my enemies gloat over me or rejoice at my downfall."

I am on the verge of collapse, facing constant pain. But I confess my sins; I am deeply sorry for what I have done. My enemies are many; they hate me though I have done nothing against them.

They repay me evil for good and oppose me because I stand for the right.

Do not abandon me, LORD. Do not stand at a distance, my God. Come quickly to help me, O LORD my savior.



Sin is not what is wrong with our minds; it is the catastrophic disorder in which we find ourselves at odds with God. This is the human condition. The facts of this disorder are all around and within us, but we would prefer to forget them.

To remember them is also to remember God, and to remember God is to have to live strenuously, vigorously, and in love. We have moments when we desire to do this, but the moments don't last long. We would rather play golf. We would rather take another battery of tests at the hospital. We would rather take another course at the university. We keep looking for ways to improve our lives without dealing with God. But we can't do it.

When we pray, we immerse ourselves in the living presence of God. When we pray the Psalms we pray through all the parts of our lives and our history and cover the ground of our intricate implication in sin. We acquire a colorful lexicon of words by which we recognize our detailed involvement in the race's catastrophic separations from God: rebel, wanderer, lawless, evil-doer, guilty, liar, fool, corrupt, wicked.

The seven "penitential psalms" (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) are the most famous for bringing us to this awareness but hardly a psalm goes by that does not bring another detail of our sin out of the shadows or our practiced forgetfulness.

Eugene Peterson

Answering God, p 113

The whole congregation is thus reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our baptismal faith.

I invite you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, to observe a holy Lent by self-examination, penitence, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving; and by reading and meditating on the Word of God. To make a right beginning, and as a mark of our mortality, let us bow before our Creator and Redeemer. Let us examine ourselves before God, humbly confessing our sins and watching our hearts, lest by self-deceit we shut ourselves out from God's presence.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

You are invited to come forward to receive the ashes and mark the cross. The ashes in the form of a cross remind you that we belong to Jesus Christ. "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

HYMN

Just as I Am, Without One Plea

#357

DEPART WITH BLESSING *(Please depart in quietness)*

Go forth into the world in the strength of God's mercy to live and to serve in newness of life. May Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven, nourish you.

Amen.

May the Lamb of God who laid down his life for all graciously smile upon you. **Amen.**

May the Lord God order all your days and deeds in peace. **Amen.**

WHAT TO GIVE UP...

- Give up complaining...focus on gratitude.
- Give up pessimism...become an optimist.
- Give up harsh judgment...think kindly thoughts.
- Give up worry...trust Divine Providence.
- Give up discouragement...be full of hope.
- Give up bitterness...turn to forgiveness.
- Give up hatred...return good for evil.
- Give up negativism...be positive.
- Give up anger...be more patient.
- Give up pettiness...become mature.
- Give up gloom...enjoy the beauty in your life.
- Give up gossiping...control your tongue.
- Give up sin...turn to virtue.
- Give up giving up...hang in there!

Change: A Prayer Poem for Ash Wednesday

Cover me with ashes,
the thick-smoke soot of the earth.
Make my breathing like the journey
from death into life — second by second,
prayer by prayer.

Cover me with a cloak — bring me low to the earth,
your justice whispering to me like the gleam of red rocks,
the colors dancing in the darkness.
Let me know the power of sage and cedar in my bones,
not that I may trap them there,
but bring them forth in words.

Cover me with darkness —
with the presence of my elders, their tears falling around me,
reminding me of why we are here —
sighing, groaning with our singing, longing to hear us into being,
stretching us beyond breathing and praying and weeping.

Cover me with mercy —
let the bones you have crushed rejoice,
like the woman who channeled every ounce of courage and dignity
to touch your cloak and find new life.
Breathe unto me life anew,

of possibility,
of beauty,
of balance,
of grace.

Cover me with mud —
bring me to my lowest state, so that in my weaknesses
I see your strength —
the reflection of your eyes in the brokenness around me,
the fullness of your love in the depths of our hearts.

Cover me with ashes —
the ashes of my grandmother,
who in living her days knew no strangers,
worked tirelessly with worn hands
and lifted grandchildren high into the air.

Cover me with mercy —
let my cheek come to rest on the cold earth,
its faithful presence a call to walk humbly
beyond myself
beyond my fears
and ever on to the red road that leads to your love.

ḫáyəs — Changer
Cover me.
Cover me with ashes.
Change me.