

## **Ash Wednesday for a Lent focussed on following Christ at work.**

This Ash Wednesday service offers a focus on beginning Lent as a period of reflection and study on following Christ at work. The Lenten focus on work as a powerful source of identity in contestation with formation through God's justice and mercy is adapted from Walter Brueggemann's conclusion that 'the imposition of ashes is not related to guilt and sin. That is, the act of ashes is not primarily an act of penance. ... but it is a call to *definitional creatureliness*, which ... we tend to forget and seek to override.'<sup>1</sup>

Ashes may be made from post-it notes and previously prepared burnt pencil shavings.

*All standing, the service begins with the following or another greeting.*

Grace and peace to you from God.

**God fill us with truth and joy.**

Let us (remain standing as we) pray (in silence) for grace to keep Lent faithfully.

*Silence*

Creator God, you hate nothing that you have made and give life to your creation. You call us to love you and serve your creation, and give us our daily work for the common good.

**You remind us we are not gods, and call us to share justly your abundant goodness. You bless us with responsibility to care for the earth.**

All of this we receive, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

*The congregation sits.*

### **The Proclamation**

Genesis 2: 7-9; 3: 2-7, 17-19.

Psalm 103:1-5, 10-14, 17-18.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—

**For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.**

The Lord forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

**For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.**

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.

**For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.**

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<sup>1</sup> W. Brueggemann, *Remember You are Dust*, Cascade Books, Eugene, Oregon, 2012, pp.78, 80.

As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

**For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.**

The steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

**For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.**

Romans 6:1-11

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

*The Sermon may include an explanation of Lent as a season for reconsidering our true identity, not as autonomous, self-made people but as followers of Christ, whose life, death and resurrection invites us to journey with him into our true personhood. We may receive an invitation to keep Lent faithfully as we attend to all that forms our identity.*

*Then all may stand. The presider may say these or other suitable words.*

Dear friends in Christ, every year we remember and celebrate Christ's death and resurrection. Lent is a time to deepen our remembering. In order that our Lent may be a time of renewal and growth we begin this season by remembering who we are and whose we are as persons made in God's image. We remember our life is a gift, and that we will die. We remember because so often we forget our mortality; we forget our responsibility to care for the earth; we forget our neighbours and their need; we forget our vocation; and finally we forget who we are and whose we are.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of Christ, to observe a holy Lent. By the sign of ashes, may you remember that God never forgets who you are, whose you are, and who you are called to love and serve.

Let us kneel and in silence and remember the infinite mercy of God, who wills for you more good than you can will for yourself.

*(Silence)*

We have not loved you and your creation with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our colleagues, friends and family as ourselves. We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven.

The presider invites any who wish, to write on a post-it note something from the formation of their identity through their work or life from which they seek release, that they may be more open to receiving their identity as God's beloved child.

*The post-it notes are collected and burnt as a symbol of relinquishing their old identity and by the grace of God's refining power, renew their true identity in freedom and dignity, human vulnerability and homecoming to the heart of God.*

*Then the presider and people say together:*

**Creator God, you forgive our forgetfulness of who we are and whose we are. You heal all our diseases, and redeem our lives from our fear of death. You crown us with steadfast love and mercy, and satisfy us with your goodness as long as we live.**

**For Christ's sake. Amen.** *(Based on Psalm 103: 3-5a)*

*The imposition of ashes follows, the presider saying,*  
Let us pray.

*[silent prayer]*

Loving God, you create us from the dust of the earth;  
may these ashes be for us a sign of our vulnerable personhood and our mortality,  
and a reminder that only by the cross do we receive the fullness of life,  
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*Those who desire to receive ashes come forward. The ashes are imposed on each person with the following words.*

Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

*This part of the service is concluded by the presider declaring a blessing:*

May God bless you with *discomfort* at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless you with *anger* at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with *tears* to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough *foolishness* to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

**Amen.** *(A Franciscan Blessing)*

The Prayers of the People.

*Spontaneous or prepared prayers by members, including petitions for their work colleagues, work organisation and industry concerns may be offered.*

## **SENDING FORTH**

May God, who has created us now make us strong for these days ahead.

May Jesus lead us in our life and work, and we be found faithful to follow.

May the Spirit comfort us in our vulnerability, burn away the chaff of our lives, and purify our hearts so we are freed to serve and praise God's justice and mercy.

And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
Be with us and remain with us always!

**Amen!**

Go in peace, to love and serve God and your neighbour.

**People: Thanks be to God!**

