

## ASH WEDNESDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

February 17, 2021

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

### GATHERING

#### PRELUDE

Luke

#### WELCOME

MJ

Good evening and welcome to Ash Wednesday worship with First Christian Church in Galesburg, Illinois.

#### CALL TO WORSHIP

MJ

Ash Wednesday is a time of naming brokenness. As we enter the season of Lent, we commit to enter also into a season of healing and recovery that requires the naming of what has been shattered as a first step. We take “the yoke” of responsibility as disciples of Jesus to be the Body of Christ—a body of those who need healing and offer healing in the world. The promise of Jesus is that he is with us in our weariness and burdens.

We will be living with stories of Jesus’ healings in this Lent season. We will see how Jesus encouraged people to open up about their lives as part of the healing process—no matter how broken. Ash Wednesday is a doorway to speaking the truth of our lives, a time to lay the brokenness of life before God.

#### PRAYER

Greg

Merciful God,  
we have lived a year of Lent.  
In the midst of it all we have seen love shine through at times  
but as we look back in this moment,  
it feels like a year of shattered dreams and shattered peace.  
We are discouraged. Even though so much feels out of our control,  
we also see the ways our own faults and failures  
to love each other fully, to care for the least, to honor your creation,  
to stand for what is right and good, have contributed to the shattering.

And so we come to you in pieces.  
Fragments, broken shells of our past selves.  
As we walk along the shores of Uncertainty and Pain,  
we ask that you meet us here.  
Help us, Healer.  
Show us Your strength and power!  
In this silence, we sense and acknowledge our yearning for wholeness.  
*Silence*

#### ASSURANCE

MJ

*(Underscoring by Steve)*

Throughout the season of Lent, we will be contemplating the symbol of broken glass—sea (or beach) glass to be specific. An unknown author has said this about the glass fragments that are collected on various shores:

*“Ordinary pieces of tableware or beer or soda bottles are flung into the ocean. Years pass, or decades, and then one day, there it is upon the shore: a small shard from one of those long ago discarded objects. Shifting currents have rounded its edges; abrasion has polished its surface; exposure to the sun has altered its hue. And so, when we happen upon it, here amidst the shells and seaweed, we can’t help but laugh with joy at what seems a miracle: this ordinary fragment of silica that time and adversity have transformed into something beautiful.”*

Time and adversity... making something beautiful out of that which, once seen as ordinary and broken, is now considered a transformed and precious piece. This is the journey we undertake. Jesus attended to those considered ordinary, broken, even those deemed unworthy. No matter what, Jesus is the lover of our souls.

## OPENING SONGS

Steve

*“Jesus Lover of My Soul”  
“How Deep the Father’s Love”*

## A MESSAGE OF BROKENNESS

## SCRIPTURE

*Matthew 11:28-30*

Greg

*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 humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

## MEDITATION

*“Shattered”*

Greg

Jesus is the great burden-bearer, the Healer of our souls. Just as we heard last Sunday in our sermon, the hand of Jesus is continually reaching out to us – to watch over us, to help us on the journey of life. He will be with us through the ups and downs – and can work in us, even in those times of brokenness and pain.

Henri Nouwen once said, “Our life is full of brokenness – broken relationships, broken promises, broken expectations. How can we live with the brokenness without becoming bitter and resentful except by returning again and again to God’s faithful presence in our lives.”

Ash Wednesday, as the beginning of Lent, developed in the 5th - 6th centuries, and was mandated in the 11th century. Although Protestants did not maintain this ritual for the most part, it came back during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century liturgical movement as an important time for reflection in which we reclaimed this symbol and ritual of our spiritual ancestors. It plays an important role in helping us make meaning in the brokenness of our lives. This year, indeed, we are aware of the fragility of life. Even though we cannot share ashes in the ways we have become accustomed, let us engage in a ritual that draws us close to the elements of creation—earth, fire, air, and water. Let it remind us that we are a part of creation, in all its beauty and its brokenness.

## **EARTH –**

The sand upon which our symbol of beach glass washes is, interestingly, the origins of glass-making. Glass is liquified, heated sand. In a way, the shards of beach glass are the epitome of “dust to dust”... or in this case, “sand to liquified sand.” To take it back even further, sand is created by the erosion of mountains and rocks over thousands or millions of years. So whether what you have on hand today is dirt or sand, we are witnessing the brokenness and erosion and weathering of the earth itself. All things become broken. All things transform. And every form we take is holy, whole, and beautiful. I invite you to touch the sand or dirt you have with you in this moment. Feel its grains, it’s decomposed nature, as we pray:

*Holy Creator God... as we feel this elemental part of who we are, we remember that we ourselves were made from the dust of the earth. To experience brokenness is the way of creation, it is not something to be ashamed of... it is the order of things. Transform us, O God. Help us recover the beauty of who we are and see the goodness in transformation.*

## **FIRE –**

**MJ**

Glass can only be created when the sand is met with the heat of fire. No wonder the scriptures and poets throughout the ages have spoken of a “refining fire.” The heat of fire is always destructive, but with intention and care and tending, what transpires from the destruction of fire can be a new form with purposes that are good, useful, and beautiful. I invite you to light your candle, if it is not already lit. Gaze upon the colors of the flame which may be white or gold or red or blue, as we pray:

*Holy Refining Fire of the Spirit... as we feel this elemental part of who we are, we remember that you invite us to fuel the flames of passionate love for you and for each other. Do not allow the flame of our spirits to lie dormant. Offer us your light and life. Transform us, O God. Help us recover the beauty of who we are and see the goodness in transformation.*

## **AIR –**

**Greg**

The scriptures depict the creation of human beings as having Holy Breath blown to animate our being. Glass vessels gained a new technique around the time of Jesus. In the first century BCE, glass blowing was invented, offering a way for molten glass to be shaped by blowing through a tube, creating an air bubble, a glass vessel, ready to for practical or artistic purposes. Breath is part of the creation of our Holy Vessels. Breath is with us in our very first cry and will be the final song as we exit this realm. I invite you to close your eyes, if this is comfortable for you, and become aware of your breath as we pray:

*Holy Giver of Breath and Life... as we feel this elemental part of who we are, we remember that this ongoing, life-giving, usually-automatic, moment-to-moment function can be an act of gratitude for our very origins. Just as our breath offers us opportunity to let go of that which we do not need in order to take in the fresh air we need, transform us, O God. Help us recover the beauty of who we were created to be and see the goodness in transformation.*

As the water meets the sand and earth at the shoreline, we also are invited to a journey of meeting the Living Water that Christ offers us. Ancient peoples made wet soil in many forms to make healing balms. Skin was moistened, blood flow was increased to the area, muscles were relaxed. This still is practiced today in many places. Our Lent series about healing, then, gives us an opportunity to use this as our Ash Wednesday ritual of anointing. I invite you to mix a little water with the dirt or sand that you have with you and create a wet mixture. Then place some in your palm—the same palm used in greeting other palms, signifying interdependent relationship. Gently rub it, making the sign of the cross, as we pray:

*Healing Presence... as we feel this elemental part of who we are, we remember you created us, shaped us  
from dust in the palm of your hand.*

*Some day we will return to dust,  
return to the palm of your hand once again, held and loved forever.*

*We lament in this moment the grittiness of life,  
the need for healing, the difficult and necessary process of transformation.*

*Mark us as your own, remold us again and again as your people. Let the recognition of our own need  
break us open yet again for the sake of others, for the sake of the world.*

*And all the people say, “Amen.”*

### **A TIME OF PRAYER**

#### **SONG PRIOR TO PRAYER**

*“Make Us Holy, Make Us Whole”*

**In your love, make us whole.  
May we rest in your compassion.  
Calm the lost, weary soul  
in the warmth of your love.  
May your peace fill our hearts.  
May we know the love of Jesus.  
By your grace, you console.  
Make us holy, make us whole.**

#### **CONFESSION/PRAYER OF PEOPLE**

**Greg**

Jesus, You are the Lover of our souls – You have created us and have loved us with an everlasting love. We are so grateful that You loved us so much that even in the midst of our sinning You sent Jesus to die for us and save our souls. Thank you, Lord, thank You for Your amazing love. Hear our prayers this day — words that saints that have gone before us have prayed over the centuries - our prayers of confession and intercession:

*O Lord, You who has mercy upon all, take away our sins,  
and mercifully kindle in us the fire of thy Holy Spirit.  
Take away from us the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh,  
a heart to love and adore Thee, a heart to delight in Thee,  
to follow and enjoy Thee, for Christ's sake, Amen*

[St. Ambrose of Milan (AD 339-397)]

*Father in Heaven,*

*Protect us in our struggle against evil.*

*As we begin the discipline of Lent,*

*make this season holy by our self-denial.*

[International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL)]

Come in and help us to see in our brokenness that You touch us and bring healing and beauty.  
May Your peace and love flood our hearts and make us to shine for You. We pray this in the  
precious name of Jesus, AMEN

## **SONG AFTER PRAYER**

*“Make Us Holy, Make Us Whole”*

**In your love, make us whole.  
May we rest in your compassion.  
Calm the lost, weary soul  
in the warmth of your love.  
May your peace fill our hearts.  
May we know the love of Jesus.  
By your grace, you console.  
Make us holy, make us whole**

## **COMMUNION – A TIME OF MERCY**

### **INVITATION TO THE LORD’S TABLE AND PRAYER**

**MJ**

Take a moment and just imagine. Imagine what that would mean to see the love in the eyes of Jesus. In the stories I read of Jesus reaching out to heal the sick, to reach the lost and forgive the sinner, I see Jesus reaching out to touch the person and look at them with eyes of compassion. I know there have been times in my life when I have bowed my head in prayer and I have cried out to Him saying, “God, I’m so sorry, please forgive me, I blew it again.” And I literally have heard and felt within my spirit, Jesus reaching out to lift up my chin and said, “Look up my child – seek my face – I love you and forgive you!” A sudden sense of warmth and love filled me up to overflowing! And I could easily have sung: Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!”

I think on Ash Wednesday each year – and at communion every week – this is the time to reflect and examine your soul – and to confess your sins to Jesus. And then to listen – to listen for that still small voice that says, “I forgive you – and I love you.”

Come to this table of forgiveness – come with open hearts and open eyes to see the look of love in His eyes for you.

### **SPECIAL**

*“Broken Vessels”*

### **WORDS OF INSTITUTION**

**Greg**

### **COMMUNION MUSIC (*while partaking*)**

**Luke**

### **CLOSING SONG**

*“Refiners Fire”*

### **BENEDICTION**

**MJ**

Now go with confidence that,  
though shattered, we are held.  
May the words of Jesus ring in your ears:  
“I will give you rest.”

And may the Spirit hover, move, and deliver  
healing to your soul and a spring in your step.

**POSTLUDE**

**Luke**