

A Liturgy for Ash Wednesday.

OPENING SENTENCES

In this service we commit to staying with ourselves and each other as we travel the Lenten journey together.

Let us reflect on the mystery of God who goes with us all the way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge that this land is God's land, and God's Spirit dwells here. We pay our respects to the elders past, present and emerging of the Bidjegal and Gweagal people of the Eora nation, who have cared for this land in time beyond our dreaming. This land on which we live and move was and always will be Aboriginal Land.

GATHERING IN GOD'S NAME

Blessed be the Lord who forgives all our sins,
whose mercy endures for ever.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Enfold me in your love, dear God,

Yet pierce my heart with your mercy.

The truths to which I am blind
Are hidden so deeply, so secretly.

***Bring the light of your wisdom
To the depths of my heart.***

Create in me a clean heart Oh God

and put a new and steadfast spirit within me.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ

The love of God

And the communion of the Holy Spirit

Be with you all.

And also with you.

LIGHTING THE CANDLE

God is here

God is always here

God is with us

God is always with us

SING: GOD OF DAY AND GOD OF DARKNESS AOV 1-56

**God of day and God of darkness,
now we stand before the night;
as the shadows stretch and deepen,
come and make our darkness bright.
All creation still is groaning
for the dawning of your might,
when the Sun of peace and justice
fills the earth with radiant light.**

**Still the nations curse the darkness,
still the rich oppress the poor;
still the earth is bruised and broken
by the ones who still want more.
Come and wake us from our sleeping,
so our hearts cannot ignore,
all your people lost and broken,
all your children at our door.**

**Show us Christ in one another,
make us servants strong and true;
give us all your love of justice,
so we do what you would do.
Let us call all people holy,
let us pledge our lives anew,
make us one with all the lowly,
let us all be one in you.**

**You shall be the path that guides us,
you the light that in us burns;
shining deep within all people,
yours the love that we must learn,
for our hearts shall wander restless
'til they safe to you return;
finding you in one another,
we shall all your face discern.**

**Gentle Father, Loving Mother,
Jesus: Brother, Saviour, Friend;
Spirit of all grace and power,
may we praise you without end.
Grant us all a peaceful resting,
let each mind and body mend,
so we rise refreshed tomorrow,
hearts renewed to kingdom tend.**

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ENTERING THE GREIVING

O God, in this quiet place
of prayer and humility before you,
the tears of our regrets fall on the ashes of truth.
We see the shadows and flickering light on the road
and the hands of longing peoples
reaching hopefully towards compassion and justice.
We listen to the grief in the sighing of our planet
as it groans and struggles for its life.
And we hear, in our minds' memories,
reminders of many missed moments
for the announcing of prophetic truth,
when our courage and commitment failed us.

**As life reaches out to hold us into good,
we often let it pass
and turn our faces from the costly road
on which Christ walked.**

¹⁴Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. (*silent reflection*)

And now, O God, as your church,
our hearts weep, when we remember
the divine dreams and visions
shining before us in Jesus the Christ.
We remember our claiming of your name
as the people of God
and the many betrayals of the great hope
to which we are called
as your church in this day.

(silent reflection)

We look at the cross
and the light of your life in all the world,
and own our claimings
of faithfulness to you, Jesus Christ.
We acknowledge that this longing
is often reduced to ashes,
and becomes a burnt sign of our lost aspirations.

**In sadness we know who we wanted to be
and who we really are.**

BURNING THE CROSSES

INVITATION TO THE OBSERVANCE OF LENTEN DISCIPLINE

From the earliest days of the Church, Christians have observed with great devotion the time of our Lord's passion and resurrection. It became the custom of the church to prepare for this by a season of prayer, reflection, penitence, fasting and generosity. In the very early church, this season was observed by those who were preparing for baptism at Easter and by those who, having been excommunicated, were to be restored to the communion of the church.

Keeping the Lenten fast was rapidly expanded to include all Christian believes so that they might be encouraged in their faith through the practice of self-examination and repentance, by prayer and fasting, by self-denial and acts of generosity and by reading and reflecting on the word of God. Therefore, I call on you, people of God, to keep a holy Lent and thereby strengthen your faith and empower the work of God within our lives, our communities and the world.

BIBLE READING: JOEL 2 1-2 12-17

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near— a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come.

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. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

BIBLE READING: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20-6:10

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions,

hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

SING: BEAUTY FOR BROKENNESS TIS 690

**Beauty for brokenness,
hope for despair,
Lord in the suffering,
this is our prayer,
bread for the children,
justice, joy, peace,
sunrise to sunset your kingdom increase.**

**Shelter for fragile lives,
cures for their ills,
work for the craftsmen,
trade for their skills;
land for the dispossessed,
rights for the weak,
voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak.**

**God of the poor,
friend of the weak,
give us compassion, we pray;
melt our cold hearts,
let tears fall like rain.
Come change our love from a spark to a flame.**

**Refuge from cruel wars,
havens from fear,
cities for sanctuary,
freedoms to share,
peace to the killing-fields,
scorched earth to green;
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain.**

**Rest for the ravaged earth,
oceans and streams,
plundered and poisoned,
our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness,
carelessness, greed;
make us content with the things that we need.**

**God of the poor,
friend of the weak,
give us compassion, we pray;
melt our cold hearts,
let tears fall like rain.
Come change our love from a spark to a flame.**

**Lighten our darkness,
breathe on this flame,
until your justice burns
brightly again;
until the nations
learn of your ways,
seek your salvation and bring you their praise.**

**God of the poor,
friend of the weak,
give us compassion, we pray;
melt our cold hearts,
let tears fall like rain.
Come change our love from a spark to a flame.**

BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 6:1-6 AND 16-21

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“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.

POEM: RECLAIMING WILDERNESS

It's time to reclaim the wilderness
I think
to revisit it and recognize
the life that is there.
Too often I have heard people
I have heard myself
say that the desert is a lifeless place,
that it is full of despair and hopelessness,
a place of desolation and the ending of things.
But when I sit there
when I pause from my everyday life
and just sit there
I find it teeming with life,
filled to overflowing with little mysteries
I might otherwise overlook.

I think the biblical people had it right
when they used one word
for wilderness and desert: both places that
in our modern, busy, proper world,
we have forgotten, ignored,
tried to escape from,
tried to insulate ourselves from.
But it's time we revisited them for,
like the dark of night,
there is so much life to be found there,
and hope,
and newness.
It is in the night
in the desert
in the wilderness –
when I let go of me –
that I can truly grab hold
of the one who made me.

MAKING THE ASHES

In ancient times, the Jewish people used ashes as a symbol to show God that they were sorry.

The ashes we make today are from the palm branches that were made on a previous Palm Sunday combined with our penitential prayers. At the time they were symbols of expectation and triumph, remorse and seeking forgiveness. As we have watched them burn, we are reminded of the costliness of Jesus' love. We are reminded also of how temporary our life here on earth is and yet how we are connected to all of God's creation. We hold within us the dust of all life and the stardust of the universe.

Pounds the burnt crosses into ashes.

The ashes are a symbol of how each and every one of us – young and old, people who come to church and those who don't, ministers and lay people – all do things from time to time that hurt God, ourselves and Other – we all do things that are not what God wants us to do. And we all fail to do and be what God intends for us to do and be.

Mixes the oil and the ashes.

Oil was an ancient symbol of healing. We mix the ashes and oil together.

(Hold the oil and ashes mix high)

In this service of ashing, we lament our wrongdoing but also recognise and celebrate that God loves us continually and unconditionally and stands with open arms ready to welcome us back when we turn from God's ways of justice, compassion and mercy for all.

Today and through Lent we remember God's sacrifice of love for us, not to condemn us but to restore us to grow into God's image.

Prayer of consecration.

Loving God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth and the dust of the stars. By Your Holy Spirit, may these ashes be to us a sign of our mortality and our sorrow. But may they also be for us a sign of our oneness in you and all your creation through the gift of your son Jesus Christ.

Amen.

RECEIVING OF THE ASHES

Blessed are you, God of all creation.

You are eternal, we are mortal, formed from the dust of the earth and the dust of the stars.

As we receive these ashes, make them a sign for us of repentance and returning to you.

Breathe into us again the breath of life.

Blessed be God for ever.

INVITATION TO RECEIVE THE SIGN OF ASHES

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

Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ. God longs for you to be whole.

THE GREETING OF PEACE

Christ has reconciled us to God in one body by the cross.

We meet in his name and share his peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

SING: HOLD THE LIGHT FOR ME ATW 484

Hold the light for me;

I need to see the way you're leading.

Need has brought me here;

at times I fear that you're not near me!

Jesus, you know a traveller gets weary.

Jesus, please show the signs of hope more clearly.

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BLESSING

Let us move into Lent in faith and truth, touching each other's lives as we go.

Let us remember that no one goes alone into the unknown but we are each held by voices in the wilderness, voices we hear in each other and even in ourselves.

With this faith, may God in Christ call us on, the God who is our Loving Parent comfort us as we go, and the Holy Spirit light the way ahead.

Amen.

SING: AS WE GO NOW SEASONS 6-6

**As we go now from this moment,
as we leave behind our time together.
May we walk with one another,
may we help each other on the way.**

**As we go now from this moment,
as we go into the future together.
May we treasure one another,
may we realise how precious we are.
May we realise how precious we are.
May we realise how precious we are.**

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