



Faith UMC OP
Lenten Devotional
2023

Ash Wednesday

Feb. 22, 2023

SCRIPTURE: Gen 3:19b

"From dust you came, to dust you shall return"

READ aloud:

The season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. Lent is the 40 days before Easter that helps Christians prepare for the Holiday. It is usually a serious time that helps people think about their lives and who Jesus is to them. Sometimes people "give up" things for Lent. This is called fasting. Some people do this so that every time they want that thing, they remember to think about God, and that everything we have comes from God. Some people also "add" things to their lives like a daily prayer or habit to help them to remember how to live like Jesus.

On Ash Wednesday people get ashes put on their foreheads and a Pastor (or Priest) will say "From dust you came, to dust you shall return." This isn't supposed to be scary, and some people even think it is comforting. Humans being "dust" comes from Genesis chapter 3 when God created humans. Hearing these words reminds me that I am not the most important thing in the world. This can be comforting to remember because I can know that God is in charge, and it isn't all up to me to fix everything. When I remember that, then I can look at my life and see that God is always with me.

ASK:

What kinds of things might people give up or add for Lent?

Are you going to give up or add anything this Lent?

Do you ever feel like it's all up to you?

What helps you to not be stressed?

PRAY:

God, thank you that you are always with us, and that it is not all up to us. Please be with us this season and help us to remember who you are in our lives. We love you, in your name, Amen.

First Sunday of Lent

Feb 26, 2023

SCRIPTURE Matthew 8:5-10,13

⁵ When Jesus went to Capernaum, a centurion approached, ⁶ pleading with him, "Lord, my servant is flat on his back at home, paralyzed, and his suffering is awful." ⁷ Jesus responded, "I'll come and heal him." ⁸ But the centurion replied, "Lord, I don't deserve to have you come under my roof. Just say the word and my servant will be healed. ⁹ I'm a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and the servant does it." ¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he was impressed and said to the people following him, "I say to you with all seriousness that even in Israel I haven't found faith like this." ¹³ Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it will be done for you just as you have believed." And his servant was healed that very moment.

READ

Sometimes God uses unexpected people to work in our lives. The centurion was someone who the people around Jesus had a hard time trusting because people like him had hurt them for many years. Sometimes in our lives we have people who are frustrating or difficult for us to work with. When I was younger, I had to be partners for a whole summer with someone who was frustrating for me to work with, it felt like even her voice made my body tense up and her jokes would bother me. Instead of staying frustrated, I decided to start praying every day for this person. Eventually, God helped me to see her in a different way, and instead of being frustrated, I began to see that God was working through her and that it was my own heart that needed to be opened. We turned out to be great friends by the end of the summer, and I knew God better because of her.

ASK

Is there anyone in your life who makes you feel frustrated?

What does your body feel like when you think about that person?

What can you do to help yourself calm down when you are in the frustrating situation?

PRAY

Dear God, thank you that you are the one who chooses who to work through and not us. Thank you for using unexpected people to do great things. Help us to keep an open mind, and love people no matter what. We love you, in your name, Amen.

Second Sunday of Lent

March 5, 2023

SCRIPTURE Matthew 7:24-27

²⁴ “Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn’t fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. ²⁶ But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn’t put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed.”

READ

When I was younger, I played a lot of sports. In college, I particularly loved Ultimate Frisbee, which is a sport kind of like touch free football but with a frisbee. I was consumed with Ultimate frisbee, and when I started to doubt my faith, I turned even deeper into the sport. Everything I did revolved around the sport, but it didn’t take me too long to dig and find that while I loved the sport, it wasn’t something that I could build my life on. We have things in life that consumes us, school, work, sports, tv shows, and it can be easy to forget that while those things are great and good to have in our lives, they make a poor foundation. We graduate from school, we retire from work, we get injured and tv shows end. When we base our identity on things that don’t last, when those things end, we can feel like we lose part of ourselves. But when we base our identities on God and who we are to God (beloved, cherished, child) then our foundation will not crumble. When things are difficult in our lives, we will stand strong because we know we belong to God.

ASK

What activities are important in your life?

What are words that you think God would use to describe you?

What can you do to remember to keep God as your foundation?

PRAY

God, thank you for seeing us as more than what we do, but for who we really are. Help us to remember to build our life on who you are and who you called us to be. We love you, in your name, Amen.

Third Sunday of Lent

March 12, 2023

SCRIPTURE Proverbs 13:20, 1 Corinthians 15:33

Walk with wise people and become wise;
befriend fools and get in trouble.

³³ Don't be deceived, bad company corrupts good character.

READ

God puts people in our life to guide us through life. Some of these people are our parents, our brothers/sisters, other family members, teachers, friends, and our faith family. All these people are put in our lives for a reason. These people generally lead us toward doing the right thing and strengthening our relationship with God. Sometimes, God puts people in our lives that lead us towards doing things we are asked not to do. Things like lying, stealing, and treating others badly. These behaviors cause us to weaken our faith and thus our relationship with God. God allows us to choose which people to follow. He is still there no matter what we choose. He meets us where we are because He loves us.

ASK

Can you remember a time when you chose to follow a person leading you in the wrong direction?

Do you feel like God has put "wise" people in your life?

What can you do to strengthen your relationship with God?

PRAY

God thank you for giving us people in our lives to guide us. Please be with us as we choose to walk with the wise, so we too can become wise. We love you, in your name. Amen

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 19, 2023

SCRIPTURE Matthew 6:2-4, Mark 1:35

² “Whenever you give to the poor, don’t blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people. I assure you, that’s the only reward they’ll get. ³ But when you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing ⁴ so that you may give to the poor in secret. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

³⁵ Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer.

READ

When we do something good, don’t you want to share it? My son has been working really hard on his spelling and his math so when he comes home—he can’t wait to tell me and then he can’t wait to tell his siblings. They think he’s bragging but I know it’s because he’s been working hard and he wants affirmation and praise that he’s doing well. And I am more than happy to give it to him because he deserves the praise for the hard work he has put into his studying. BUT if he got a good grade at school and he started asking everyone what they got and also shared that he had gotten a great grade—his hard work now seems like he’s competing with his classmates or that he really is bragging and being boastful.

The difference in the two scenarios is the reason for sharing—that my son’s intention in the first scenario is to share that his hard work and that it paid off. In the second scenario, it is to boast or brag that he did well—it is more for showing others rather than a “personal” achievement.

In the scriptures above, God isn’t saying—not to give openly or to always pray alone—it’s more about when done “in private”—the giving and the prayers—is personal—just you and God. Setting our hearts and intentions to WHY we are praying and giving versus making it show for others to see.

ASK

What are some things that you might want to share with your family?

Are there times when giving openly and publicly is okay?

Are there circumstances where prayer with others might be important?

PRAY

Dear God: Thank you for being good and faithful to us. Help us to pray and give because we want to thank YOU for all the goodness, not for the recognition of other people. Help us set our hearts, our minds and our intentions in that light. Amen.

Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 26, 2023

SCRIPTURE Matthew 14:13-21

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

¹⁶ Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

¹⁷ "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

¹⁸ "Bring them here to me," he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

READ

Sometimes the things that feel impossible to us are totally possible to God! This story is a great example of a miracle- something totally unexpected that happened because people had faith. Sometimes it can feel like things won't work out or there isn't enough time, money, or helpers to get something done. If we are working on something that brings glory to God- it can be possible if we believe that God will help us.

ASK

What do you think the disciples were thinking when Jesus told them to feed the people?

What do you think the crowds were thinking when Jesus started out with a small basket of bread and fish?

Do you ever feel overwhelmed or that you can't solve a problem in your life?

Can you think about a time that God provided you something unexpectedly?

PRAY

Dear God, thank you for always being there for us. Help us to remember that you are bigger than any problem that we face. We know that you help us to be strong and brave, and that all things are possible with you. We love you, in your name, Amen.

Palm Sunday

April 2, 2023

SCRIPTURE: James 1:2-4

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

READ

When a challenging circumstance happens it's easy to ask "why me?" and "why did this happen?". Oftentimes my instinct is to play the "blame game". I ask myself, what did I do wrong that caused this to happen? Instead, it's helpful to reframe the situation into a learning lesson. What is God teaching me? How can I help others also experiencing this pain?

I recently received a not-so-great medical diagnosis that caused my heart to ache with sadness. Immediately, I thought, why me? Why do bad things happen to good people? I'm a good person, right? The following month, I found myself praying every time I was reminded of the diagnosis. I prayed for a different result; for positive news. Two months later a friend reached out, informing me that she received the same medical diagnosis. She was at the beginning of her journey though coping while I was in the middle. I was able to walk her through the hardest week of her life. My friend told me many times that she was grateful to have me, a person who had experienced the same pain, to accompany her. After reflecting on my prayers, I asked myself, did God use me as a guide for my friend? I'd like to think so.

ASK

Describe a time in your life that was hard for you.

How did you feel about God during this time?

What did you learn from this time? Was this time able to help other people?

PRAY

Dear God, I trust that you are with me during the joyful and hard times. Thank you for showing me that difficult moments can lead to education and support of others experiencing similar things. In unexpected times, thank you for using me to help friends and family. I know that life is full of ups and downs and I have faith that the lessons learned along the way will guide me. Amen.