



Ash Wednesday

February 17, 2021
A Service for Use at Home

WHAT IS ASH WEDNESDAY?

In the Bible people put ashes on their heads to convey distress or deep grief. Traditionally, we mark our heads with ash on the first day of Lent to lament what we can't control: that sin still has a deep hold on us and that, one day, we will die. In naming these hard truths, we make room for God to step into our lives and to make a way in the wilderness. While we cannot impose ashes this year, the invitation of this season remains — the invitation to deepen our relationship with God, the invitation to commit ourselves anew to the way of Christ.

PREPARE

*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 ...*

Joel 2:12-13

Center yourself with a few moments of silence. Bring to mind the ways in which you long for forgiveness: the relationships that have crumbled, the places where your compassion runs dry, the habits and patterns in your life that feel dusty and in need of renewal.

READ [Psalm 51:1-17](#) silently or aloud.

REFLECT

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

In what ways do you hope God will renew your spirit during this holy season? Spend a few moments in prayer, reflecting upon the ways your heart has betrayed the faith you profess. If it is helpful, write some words or phrases on a piece of paper. Perhaps, post this paper in your home so that you can return to this prayer throughout the season of Lent.

REMEMBER

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Like the water that washes over us in baptism, God's grace washes over us, cleansing our hearts and renewing our spirits. If it is meaningful for you, fill a bowl with water and trace the watermark of the cross upon your forehead. Remember the promise of baptism: God has claimed you as a beloved child and called you to holy work.

PRAY

We are dust, and to dust we shall return.
But you, O God, work wonders with dust.
Long ago, you reached into Eden's clay,
molded us in your likeness,
and breathed into us the breath of life.

Draw near to us, as you did at the dawn of time.
Fashion us anew, and enliven us with your Spirit,
that we — creatures of dust —
might reflect your image to all around us,
and bear healing love to a broken world.

As we begin this Lenten journey,
turn our hearts and minds toward you,
and help us live the faith of our baptism,
that we might be like springs of water,
refreshing lives that thirst for wholeness and hope. Amen.

Some of the language in this service is borrowed from the Ash Wednesday Imposition Cards available at Barn Geese Worship (barngeseeworship.com).