



Ash Wednesday

February 17, 2021

Service of the Word - Online

with First Lutheran Church - Sandpoint, ID

GATHERING

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements -

Threshold to the Dark Woods

(Together, we prepare for 40 days with Jesus in the wilderness)

(Video soloist)

*There's a path... though it winds its way through darkness
We would choose... to avoid it if we could
We awake... to an unexpected calling
God says, "come... there are gifts in the Dark Wood"*

Leader speaks: It feels like we have been in the Dark Wood, the wilderness for long enough. Isn't it about time we reached the promised land? Most of us have had enough with experiencing uncertainty, being out of control, staying in one place, and being lost. Enough is enough! We want out. We want spring. We want to get on with our lives.

Yet, before we get there, the season of Lent invites us to consider where we are, a little while longer.

I chose this series for Lent, because I don't think we have discovered all that God wants to teach us through this and other Dark Wood moments of our lives. And, no, we are not going to talk about just how to get out of it, as if life is good only when we are not in the Dark Wood. We are going to explore what it might mean for our lives to recognize the gifts of the Dark Wood.

What if times of uncertainty, being lost, and being out of control are opportunities for spiritual awakening?

[soloist sings again and then invites group to echo]

*There's a path (echo: **there's a path**) ... though it winds its way through darkness
We would choose (**we would choose**) ... to avoid it if we could
We awake (**we awake**) ... to an unexpected calling
God says, "come (**God says, "come**) ... there are gifts in the Dark Wood"*

GREETING

The assembly stands. The presiding minister and the assembly greet each other.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

A brief silence is kept before the prayer.

Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and our neighbors. Call forth our prayers and acts of kindness, and strengthen us to face our mortality with confidence in the mercy of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

WORD

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

PSALM: Psalm 51:1, 6-12

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

⁶Indeed, you delight in truth deep within me,
and would have me know wisdom deep within.

⁷Remove my sins with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be purer than snow.

⁸Let me hear joy and gladness;
that the body you have broken may rejoice. R

⁹Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my wickedness.

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

¹¹Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit. R

SECOND READING: 2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:2[3-10]

^{20b}We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{6:1}As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For 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!

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION -

**Let your steadfast love come to us, O Lord.
Save us as you promised; we will trust your word.**

GOSPEL: Matthew 14:22-33 The Message

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

22-23 As soon as the meal was finished, he insisted that the disciples get in the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he dismissed the people. With the crowd dispersed, he climbed the mountain so he could be by himself and pray. He stayed there alone, late into the night.

24-26 Meanwhile, the boat was far out to sea when the wind came up against them and they were battered by the waves. At about four o'clock in the morning, Jesus came toward them walking on the water. They were scared to death. "A ghost!" they said, crying out in terror.

27 But Jesus was quick to comfort them. "Courage, it's me. Don't be afraid."

28 Peter, suddenly bold, said, "Master, if it's really you, call me to come to you on the water."

29-30 He said, "Come ahead."

Jumping out of the boat, Peter walked on the water to Jesus. But when he looked down at the waves churning beneath his feet, he lost his nerve and started to sink. He cried, "Master, save me!"

31 Jesus didn't hesitate. He reached down and grabbed his hand. Then he said, "Faint-hearted, what got into you?"

32-33 The two of them climbed into the boat, and the wind died down. The disciples in the boat, having watched the whole thing, worshiped Jesus, saying, "This is it! You are God's Son for sure!"

"The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

HOMILY

*Pastor John Thornburg wrote about an Ash Wednesday service years ago:
"I remember an Ash Wednesday service early in my ministry in which one of the durable saints of the congregation graced me with an epiphany. When I came to her place at the altar rail, I imposed her forehead and said, "Marjorie, remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." She looked up at me with a tender and discerning glance from her 75 year old eyes, and said, 'THANK GOD.'*

I had never really thought of mortality as good news, but she did.”

Tonight as we begin our journey reflecting on the Gifts of the Dark Wood, we remember this gift of death, for it contains within it the gift of life beyond death.

Yes, this includes our eternal life in the heavens.

And, the ways God daily lifts us from the deaths we experience everyday: broken relationships, loss of jobs, changes from our routine, admitting we cannot do what we once could, and more.

Lifts us and heals our grieving hearts so we may live more fully as ourselves, held by God’s promise through Jesus Christ.

HYMN OF THE DAY: *Precious Lord, Take My Hand* (ELW 773)

Precious Lord, take my hand.
Lead me on; let me stand.
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light.
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

When the darkness appears
and the night draws near
and the day is past and gone,
at the river I stand;
guide my feet, hold my hand.
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

When my way grows drear,
Precious Lord, linger near.
When my life is almost gone,
hear my cry, hear my call
Hold my hand lest I fall.
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

INVITATION TO LENT

Friends in Christ, today with the whole church we enter the time of remembering Jesus’ passover from death to life, and our life in Christ is renewed.

We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance and for God’s mercy. We are created to experience joy in communion with God, to love one another, and to live in harmony with creation. But our sinful rebellion separates us from God, our neighbors, and creation, so that we do not enjoy the life our creator intended.

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to a discipline that contends against evil and resists whatever leads us away from love of God and neighbor. I invite you, therefore, to the

discipline of Lent—self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love—strengthened by the gifts of God’s means of grace. Let us continue our journey through these forty days to the great Three Days of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Confession and Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✚ one God, the keeper of the covenant, the source of steadfast love, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

God hears us when we cry, and draws us close in Jesus Christ. Let us return to the one who is full of compassion.

Silence is kept for reflection. -

Fountain of living water,

pour out your mercy over us.

Our sin is heavy, and we long to be free.

Rebuild what we have ruined and mend what we have torn.

Wash us in your cleansing flood.

Help us step out of our comfort zones.

Make us alive in the Spirit to follow in the way of Jesus, as healers and restorers of the world you so love. Amen.

Beloved, God’s word never fails.

The promise resides through grace:

by the saving love of Jesus Christ, your sins are ✚ forgiven, and God remembers them no more.

Jesus is extending his hand, make your way with him.

Amen.

Prayers of the People: “Come and Rest”

*Come and rest (echo: **come and rest**)*

*Come and listen (echo: **come and listen**)*

Lay the fullness of your lives before the Maker (echo is a canon)

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

Holy, Living God,
We give you thanks for the gift of community journeying together
in this season of reflection.

We offer up all the stories of our lives,
the ones spoken aloud tonight
and the ones left unspoken in the quiet of our hearts.

(Give time for the assembly to offer their petitions)

You know each one, O God.
We pray this night for all who feel alone on their journey.

Open us to be the hand of Jesus, reaching out as Jesus has done for us.

We pray this in his name, offering the words he taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

OFFERING -

I invite you to gather cold ashes from your fire place or soil and place it in a small bowl.

Keep it in a place where you will be for your daily prayers and thanksgiving.

May they continue to stir reflection on your mortality and need for God this week.

“Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.”

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

BLESSING

Please speak the words in bold when we get to them.

May the Spirit of the Living God,
Made known to us most fully within life's Dark Wood:
Go before you to show you the way;
Go above you to watch over you;
Go behind you to push you into places you may not necessarily go yourself;
Go beneath you to uphold and uplift you;
Go beside you to be your strong and constant companion;

And dwell within you to remind you that you are surely not alone,
Yes, may the fire of God's blessing burn brightly upon you, and within you,
Now and always.

Amen.

Postlude

Worship Notes:

From sundaysandseasons.com.

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Series based on *Gifts of the Dark Wood* by Eric Elnes

All liturgy by Marcia McFee, www.worshipdesignstudio.com

“There's a Path” & “Come and Rest,” words by Marcia McFee, music by Chuck Bell. “Precious Lord” text by Thomas A Dorsey and music adapted; copyright 1966 Unichappell Music.

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Announcements:

Please see the Lenten Guide for 2021 and Lenten Bags either delivered or picked up from church. Call the church office if you would like one, but have not yet received one.

Items to support you life of prayer during the season.

With Bonner County moved into the Orange Category in response to Covid-19, the Council is considering resuming in person worship with safety protocols. Information will be shared once the date is known.