

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

Worship Service from February 17, 2021

Ash Wednesday



## Call to Worship

### Introduction to Service

As we enter the season of Lent this Ash Wednesday evening, we begin a time when we recognize the brokenness that brought Christ to the cross. This year we also hope to enter into a season of healing and recovery. But the first step is to name what has been shattered. As disciples of Jesus, we take “the yoke” of responsibility to be the Body of Christ—a body of those who simultaneously need and offer healing. Jesus promises that he is with us in our weariness and burdens.

### Confession

Throughout this season, we will be living with stories of Jesus’ healings in the Gospel of Matthew. We will see how Jesus encouraged people to open up about their lives as part of the healing process—no matter how broken they are. Henri Nouwen said, Our life is full of brokenness—broken relationships, broken promises, broken expectations. How can we live with that brokenness without becoming bitter and resentful except by returning again and again to God’s faithful presence in our lives? Ash Wednesday developed as a doorway to speaking the truth of our lives, a time to lay the brokenness of life before our God.

What if the deeper you know your own brokenness the deeper you can experience your own belovedness? -- Anne Voskamp

Let us pray: Merciful God, it seems like 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, we also recognize a year of shattered dreams and shattered peace. Many are discouraged. So much of life feels out of our control. But we also recognize ways that 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 brokenness. 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 our strength. Forgive our inertia. Inspire us to move one step at a time toward greater care. In this silence, we sense and acknowledge our yearning for wholeness. **SILENCE**

## Holy Vessels (music)

Vessels, holy and whole,  
Broken, needing the One  
Open, body and soul  
Healer --- , come.

This simple refrain is a series theme thread that will link our weekly journey together throughout Lent. Let's sing it again.

### Assurance

Throughout the season of Lent, we will be contemplating the symbol of broken glass—sea (or beach) glass to be specific. (The glass in our kits isn't exactly that, it only represents that, so be careful with the edges). An unknown author has said this about the glass fragments that are collected on various shores:

*“Ordinary pieces of tableware or ... 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, and as he enters and does his work, he turns us into something beautiful. Paul wrote it in 2 Corinthians 4,

*But we have this precious treasure [the good news about salvation] in [unworthy] earthen vessels [of human frailty], so that the grandeur and surpassing greatness of the power will be [shown to be] from God [His sufficiency] and not from ourselves. (AMP)*

In Jesus' kindness and mercy, he reached out with his hands to people who need something good in their life, healing, value, respect, gracious hospitality, and saving from our failures. Therefore, based on that ever-reaching grace, in the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

**Music Intro** And with that assurance, let's sing of God's love as shown in Jesus' kindness -- the kind of kindness he also calls his people to share.

**Music # 273** *Jesus Hands Were Kind Hands*

## Theme

Lent is a time of the year we do our best to turn away from things (a food or habit), or take on something new (volunteering, reading more) that will help us grow closer with God. But in many ways this whole year has felt like one long Lent. We've all had to give up so much of normal ways of living life, whether we chose to or didn't. And we've all found ourselves taking on new things, learning new skills to help us cope with this challenging time. For many, our bodies are tired. Our minds are overwhelmed. Our souls are weary. What we need is *healing*.

As already said, a first step of healing is telling the truth to God about what hurts. Just like when we are sick or hurt and we go to the doctor. The doctor asks you to describe what's wrong. If you say, "Oh, nothing." The doctor won't know how to help you. God does know what's wrong more than a doctor, yet the mending process often requires that we first name to him what is broken. If we can't admit it, how can he work with us on it?

Before we can dance in the light, we must first acknowledge the night. You may want to try this exercise. We will do it now, but probably too quickly for us to give it some extended serious thought, so I encourage you to do it again when you can create your own space and time. On one side of a sheet of paper, write down any hurts you are feeling. It could be games or concerts that were cancelled, an inability to be with friends, or frustration with having to do so many things online instead of in person. It could be anger at situations that aren't fair for yourself or others.

Having done that, are you ready to move on from your hurts? What if we just erased all these hurts and made them go away. **Erase, or scribble** over everything you just wrote. But no matter how much we erase, we can still see the hurts there, or if we scribbled over them, they are still there, they are just covered up. We can't pretend hurts never happen.

What if we **wad them up** and throw them on the ground. How would that work? Well, we didn't really get rid of the hurts, and we made a mess. Pick it up and smooth it out. How about we **tear the sheet** in half and say good-bye to the side that we wrote the hurts on and throw that away? Did that make a difference, or are the hurts still there?

Well, we are going to have to keep working at it -- unlike tv and movies, we can't always solve every problem and wrap everything up in a quickly wrapped and tied up in a nice, neat, simple, bow. That's why Lent isn't just an hour, or a day, it is a season -- a repeating season, a season we may well be living even outside of the official Lent season.

But isn't it wonderfully reassuring to know that no matter what we're going through, we can always turn to God in prayer. We can ask God's help for ourselves or others. And God, like any truly great healer, listens. God always hears our prayers. So here is a quick prayer.

Loving God, We come to you with Hearts [*hands over heart*] Hands [*hands raised*] Minds [*point to head*] And Souls [*praying hands*] In need of your healing touch. Heal us from the inside out [*breathe in and sigh out*] So that we may reach out to help heal your world. Amen.

For we know that while God's world remains broken, he weeps....

### **Video Music TFWS # 2048 God Weeps**

### **An Ancient Word – Bible Reading**

The key passage for tonight is what Jesus offers in all our brokenness. This ancient word comes from Matthew 11:28-30. “

*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.”* (NRSV)

### **Sermon Broken**

With these words, “Come to me.” Jesus invites each of us on a journey to “rest” in his presence. Just as God told Moses that his journey in the wilderness would be accompanied by the divine presence, giving “rest” along the way. Jesus tells those who would be his disciples that their burdens would be lighter because he would be with them, and we can learn from him.

Our Lenten Series, *Holy Vessels*, will focus on what we can learn about healing from Jesus and then to “go and do likewise” -- to continue, as his followers, the work of healing on his behalf. We will find out that “healing” is much more than physical cures. Our physical health is intertwined with social, communal, moral, and holistic health. This real “recovery” of beauty to our lives enables us to wear just the right, best fitting “yoke” as individuals and as a church together. Yokes in those days were often used to pair 2 or 4 oxen when tilling the farmer's field, allowing them to share the load of the plow blade (or blades) dragging through the hard dirt. But even more than that -- often young rookie oxen were paired with more mature, stronger oxen as a way of training the young. Of course, the more experienced ox pulls a bigger share of the load as he helps the younger along. Two applications could be drawn. One is that Jesus himself yokes with us as the

powerful mature one who is training us and making our load lighter as he does the heavy pulling for us while we are still building our spiritual muscles. And/or he is the farmer who knows just who to pair us with in the corporate body of Christ (the church) to help all of us grow strong and experienced in the faith.

### with Ritual Action

While we got away from it for a while (especially in Protestantism), Ash Wednesday has been reclaimed from our spiritual ancestors as an important symbol and ritual through which we reflect on the fragility and brokenness of our lives. Through our Lenten kits, candle and water, let us begin by reflecting on the traditional 4 elements of creation—earth, fire, air, and water, and remind ourselves that we are a part of it.

**EARTH** - If you haven't already, place your sand in a bowl (and I'm going to put that purple in there too, to remind us of that repentant color and that preparation, color, and what we are using as "sea glass" on it. Sea glass washes in on the sand, and interestingly, is the origins of glass-making. Glass is liquified, heated sand. In a way, the shards of beach glass, which is "sand to liquified sand" stands as a perfect symbol for Ash Wednesday which often talks about "dust to dust"... To take it back even further, sand is created by the erosion of mountains and rocks over thousands or millions of years. Sand is a witness to the brokenness and erosion and weathering of the earth itself. All things become worn out and broken. But 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, or if you don't have any, use your memory or imagination to feel its grains, its 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. Amen.*

Earth, **FIRE** – Light a candle, or if you don't have one imagine... Glass can only be created when the sand is met with the heat of fire. Scriptures and poets throughout the ages have spoken of a "refining fire." The heat of fire is 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 a candle, if you have one, it is not already lit. I thought it fitting that this one happens

to be called Tranquil Sea. Gaze (or imagine you are if you don't have a candle) gaze on the colors of the flame 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. but let your Spirit blow on us and rekindle your gifts of light and life. Transform us, O God. Help us recover the beauty of who we are and see the goodness in transformation. Amen.*

Earth, Fire, **AIR** - The scriptures depict the creation of human beings as having Holy Breath blown to animate (to bring to life) our being. Glass vessels gained a new technique of glass blowing right around the time of Jesus. It allowed molten glass to be shaped by blowing through a tube, creating an air bubble, a glass vessel, ready for practical or artistic purposes. Breath is part of the creation of our Holy Vessels. Job 33:4 says *The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.* (NRSV) 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. And this is the core of our relationship with the creation—sharing and existing within this atmosphere. 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 are and see the goodness in transformation. Amen.*

Earth, Fire, Air, **WATER** - As the water meets the sand at the shore, we also are invited to a journey of meeting the Living Water that Christ offers us. Ancient peoples made wet soil in many forms as healing balms, which is still practiced in many places today. Skin is moistened, blood flow increased to the area, muscles relaxed. Our Lent series about healing, then, gives us an opportunity to use this as our Ash Wednesday ritual of anointing. At this time too, if you wish, can use the water to place the temporary cross tattoo from your kit on your inner wrist, back of palm, forehead, or wherever else you choose. Peel the plastic off of the paper, and put the cross side of the paper where you want it to be on your skin, Wet the paper and rub it, and then remove the paper. And hopefully, the cross will remain. If you

choose not to, you can stick the cross in the display as a reminder. As an alternative, or next, I invite you to mix a little water with the dirt or sand that you have with you and create a wet mixture in the palm of your right hand – the palm with which we used to be able use to greet others, signifying the that in spite of covid and all other factors of life, our interdependence remains. With the mixture in your palm, with your opposite pointing finger, draw with your finger a cross, with the wet sand between -- feel the texture of how the sand comes together to heal, as I 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. Amen.*

## **Intro Communion**

It is Jesus' kind and gentle hands that saves us. He does it out of his love that weeps, bleeds, cries, and waits for us. So as we approach him through our Communion service, know that he hears our cries for healing of body, mind, spirit, and relationship. We know that he is already at work among us, showing us the way to recovery from the toxicities and grief of our time. We pray for those who are shattered by the violence of circumstances, tumbled by the forces of life, and washed up on shores, distant from all that feels whole. We hear Jesus calling us to come home to him, to come where he can give us rest in his arms. Let's prepare our hearts by singing

## **Song of Preparation # 348 *Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling***

### **Communion**

Our God is with you! So lift up your hearts and give thanks to our Sovereign God. For it is always a right, good, and joyful thing to do, to always and everywhere give thanks to you Creating Father. In the beginning you breathed life into raw materials, creating and animating containers of beauty and goodness. We, your Holy Vessels, were fired in the kiln of love until we shined with your light. Susceptible to shattering, we find ourselves broken, unable at times to remember your promise of repair. You remind us time and again that, though broken, we are held in your presence and made whole by your grace.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ, the Holy Vessel of Divine Presence on earth. Your Spirit anointed him as a container of grace in the form of preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives recovering of sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed, and announcing that the time had come when you would save your people.

Jesus healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with those considered too broken for company or association. By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection you gave birth to the path of healing and recovery, delivered us from our despair and isolation, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

When Jesus ascended, he promised to be with us always. In the power of your Word and Holy Spirit, we are not alone. And so, in remembrance of the healing, life-transforming acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith. **Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.**

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and cup, and on whatever we are using in homes. Make them be for us your Healing Spirit through Christ, so that we may be for the world the body of Christ, healing agents in a broken world, offering the life-blood of hope.

For on the night in which he gave himself up for us, **he took bread**, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **[Eat]**

When the supper was over, **he took the cup**, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **[Drink]**

Now by your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet. All this is through your Son Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, Healing God, now and forever. **Amen.**



**Music Intro:** Now as we enter into the Lenten season, let us do so with confidence, fearing neither the season, nor the storms of life, letting God gently whisk away our fears, our storms, our challenges in his sovereign time, by the wind of his life giving breath.

**Music # 129 *Give to the Winds Thy Fears***

**Blessing**

Now go with confidence that, though broken, we are held. Begin the journey of recovering your depth of love for all and your joy of living in this world. May the words of Jesus ring in your ears: "I will give you rest." And may the Spirit hover, move, and deliver salve to your soul and a spring to your step. **Amen.**

