



seeking:

*Is this the fast
that I choose?*

March 1, 2023 + Ash Wednesday

*An asterisk * invites you to stand in body or in spirit, and you are invited to read aloud responses found in **bold**.*

We welcome you to First Lutheran Church!

we GATHER here

*“Abide with Me”
(text found at
hymn no. 629) is
a prayer to God
for presence
“when other
helpers fail and
comforts flee.”
How can we be
the presence of
God to those in
need?*

*Ash Wednesday is
the only day in
the church year
where the Kyrie is
suggested in
place of an
opening hymn. As
we start the
Lenten season, we
sing this familiar
tune as we pray
for renewal and
clean hearts.*

Prelude — “Abide with Me”

Setting by Anne Krentz Organ
Lauren Shoemaker, flute

***Kyrie** — pg. 203, front of hymnal

***Welcome and Words of Gathering**

We gather together at the edge of a new season.

We stand together on the cusp of something new.

Will we wade into self-reflection?

Will we invite honesty to dance?

Will we listen for God’s invitation?

Will we seek deeper faith?

What kind of fast do we choose? What kind of faith will we build?

We gather together at the edge of a new season.

Listen, God is speaking.

***Prayer of the Day**

May God be with you. **And also with you.** Let us pray.

Living God, **we want to hear your voice. Shout loudly; don’t hold back. Move in our spirits the way you moved over the waters of creation. We are beginning a new season today, God, and we don’t want to begin anything without you. So speak to us today— through silence, through scripture, through song. Speak to us as you spoke to the Israelites so many moons ago. Speak to us like a gentle breeze or a loud trumpet. We don’t care how, we just long to hear your voice. So don’t hold back. We are here. We are listening. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

we LISTEN and RESPOND

A Reading from the book of Isaiah — Isaiah 58:1-12

Many of today's "Words for Worship" from A Sanctified Art are based on this passage from Isaiah.

Shout out, do not hold back!
Lift up your voice like a trumpet!
Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.
Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced
righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments,
they delight to draw near to God.
"Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?"
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast
day, and oppress all your workers.
Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.
Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?
Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.
Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many
generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

Hear these words of old
as we seek to know God today.

Hymn — no. 188, paraphrase of Psalm 51:10-12

"Create in Me a Clean Heart"

A Reading from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians — 5:20b-6:10

In the Lutheran tradition, it is common to conclude the scripture readings with a spoken response. As we begin a new season in our church year, you are invited to join in this new response.

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.

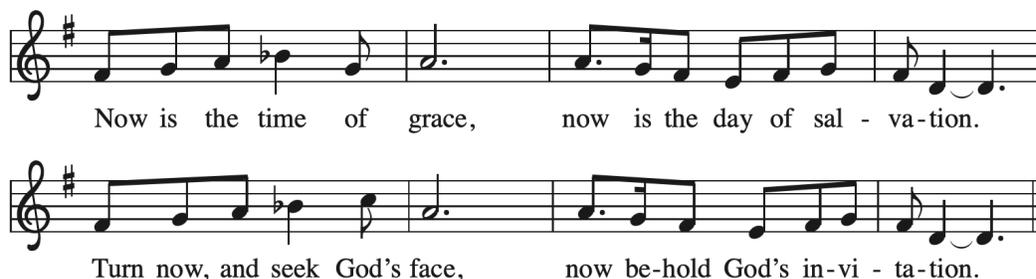
As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says,

"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.

Hear these words of old **as we seek to know God today.**

Marty Haugen
penned this
refrain, which
appears in the
recent All
Creation Sings
hymnal.

*Gospel Acclamation — no. 918



Now is the time of grace, now is the day of sal - va - tion.
Turn now, and seek God's face, now be-hold God's in - vi - ta - tion.

*Gospel — Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

The Gospel of Matthew, the 6th chapter.

Glory to you, O God.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] “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.”

The Gospel of Jesus.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

Pastor Chris Culuris

In the passage from Isaiah, we hear examples of behavior that is pleasing to God - namely, acts of justice and service. This hymn reflects many kinds of service to which we are called.

*Hymn — no. 712

“Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service”

*Affirmation of Faith

You are invited to share in this affirmation of faith, inspired by the words of Isaiah 58.

**We believe in a God who chooses freedom,
who unties every rope and carries our burdens.**

**We believe in a God who ushers in the poor and the hungry,
who has a seat saved for all of us.**

**We believe in a God whose love is like the sun,
who says, “I’m here, I’m here!” every time we cry.**

**We believe in a God who walks before us in the parched places,
who rescues our bones, who tends to us like a gardener.**

And because we believe, we strive to choose love.

Because we believe, we strive to pursue justice. Because we believe...Amen.

Confession is a central part of the Ash Wednesday service. This year, new words from A Sanctified Art bookend a more traditional confession found in our hymnal.

***Call to Confession**

Our scripture passage for today tells the story of people who are trying hard to be faithful. They ask God, “God, do you notice? Do you see all the good we’re doing?

Are you proud of us?” It sounds a bit like children seeking parental attention.
Did we do a good job?

In those moments we always want to hear God say, “Excellent job, good and faithful servant.” But in today’s scripture, God says to the people, “I want you to seek justice.”

Friends, faith is a constant dance of us asking God, “Am I doing it right?” and, “How can I do better?”

During confession, we linger in this tension for a moment. We acknowledge that we are works in progress and we ask for God’s help. God may challenge us, but fortunately, God will never abandon us. So let us turn to God in prayer.

***Confession of Sin** — pg. 252, *front of hymnal*

***Confession and Forgiveness**

Merciful God,
How many times in a day could we choose love?
How many times could we choose justice?
How many times could we speak kindly to ourselves?
How many times could we offer grace?
How many times, God? And how often do we miss it?
Forgive us for choosing the path you did not travel.
Forgive us for hitching our horse to the world’s measure of goodness,
instead of yours.
**Return our hearts to you, and guide us continually,
even in the parched places.**
With gratitude we pray,
amen.

Family of faith, when a baby is learning to walk, the parents do not criticize the baby for falling. Instead, they celebrate every wobbly step. They applaud every hesitant stand. They whoop and holler when their child lands in their arms.

Surely the same must be true of God. Although we often lose our way and we often choose the wrong thing, I imagine God whoops and hollers with every step in God’s direction.

So hear and believe the good news of the gospel: no matter how many times we fall, no matter how many times we choose the wrong path, God is waiting for us at the end with open arms. In Jesus’ name ✠, we are forgiven. We are invited. We belong.

Thanks be to God for a love like that. Amen.

Imposition of Ashes

Music for Reflection

“Just As I Am”

Setting by Sandra Eithun
Handbell Choir; Lauren Shoemaker, flute

During this time, all are invited to come up to the front to receive ashes. As desired, you are welcome to kneel at the rail in silent prayer or meditation before returning to your seat.

Join in singing
this text specific
to our Ash
Wednesday
service, sung to
the tune
KINGSFOLD.

“All Things of Dust to Dust Return” — no. 920, from *All Creation Sings*

**1. All things of dust to dust return
on earth and in the sky.
The hottest, brightest suns that burn
in time grow dim and die.
The fish that leap,
the birds that soar,
the newborn young that play,
the leaves that fill the forest floor
revert to dust and clay.**

**2. God, mark with dust and ash my brow
so I may comprehend
that ev'ry moment here and now
links me to that same end**

**3. I share with all
that breathe and burn,
that flare and fade and tire
yet by their waning light discern
your own undying fire.**

**God, mark upon my brow this sign:
a stark and barren cross
reminding me that though divine
you know my pain and loss,
and at the touch of dust and ash
awake my heart to view
how death itself is but a flash
that dies away in you.**

“Be Thou My
Vision” (ELW no.
793) is always
suggested on Ash
Wednesday for its
references to God
as our treasure,
connecting to
today’s reading
from the gospel.

Offering

Music During Offering
“Be Thou My Vision”

Setting by Mark Sedio
Lauren Shoemaker, flute

***Offering Prayer**

God of goodness and growth, all creation is yours, and your faithfulness is sure. Receive the gifts we bring, and nourish us to proclaim your abiding love in our communities and in the world, through Jesus Christ, our strength and our song. Amen.

we SHARE the meal

This year, we
return to
Evangelical
Lutheran
Worship (the
name of our red
hymnal) Setting
Five for our
communion
liturgy.

***The Great Thanksgiving** — pg. 161, *front of hymnal*

***Sanctus** — pg. 162, *front of hymnal*

***Words of Institution and Prayers**

God of the lost and the found, surely it is right for us to give our thanks and praise; for day after day we look for you, and day after day we find you: in the laughter of children, in the sun rising over the horizon, in the flowers of spring.

Our seeking does not go unanswered, and for that we are grateful.

So first and foremost, we come to you in prayer to say thank you, for when we’re seeking beauty, you give us mountains and freckles, green eyes and brown eyes. When we’re looking for reason to hope, you give us rainbows after the storm, and candles flickering in the window. When we’re seeking peace, you give us three part harmony and the sound of the rain.

And when we’re seeking justice, your life reminds us that everyone is welcome at your Table, and none shall be turned away.

For all these reminders we are deeply grateful.

And yet, gracious God, our seeking does not stop.
For even though your fingerprints are all over this world,
we are not yet at your promised day.

So in addition to our gratitude, we also pray today for conviction.
Do not let us get comfortable with half-hearted seeking.
Do not let us grow numb to the suffering of this world.
Make us relentless in our pursuit of justice—
relentless in our consoling of the grieving,
in our welcoming of the stranger, and in the feeding of the hungry.
Like a dog with a scent, may we walk toward your kingdom,
never giving up, never wandering off the path.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for
you. Do this for the remembrance of me.
Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the
forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

And as we see and as we seek, pour out your Spirit on this ordinary bread and cup.
May this meal be the nourishment we need to continue seeking you in the world.

Until your promised day, we will pray. Until your promised day, we will seek, saying:
**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be
done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as
we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us
from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

***Invitation to the Table**

Friends, if your seeking has led you here,
if your weary heart followed breadcrumbs all the way to this sanctuary,
then I have good news: you do not have to seek anymore.
This table is God's Table.
So if you came here looking for justice,
then rest in the comfort that all will be fed here.
If you came seeking beauty,
then let your spirit marvel at the beauty of a community coming together.
If you came seeking a brush with the Divine,
then know that God is present in this ordinary meal.
So kick off your walking shoes. Let your weary heart stop the search.
We are standing on holy ground. This is God's Table.
All are invited. Come.

Distribution of Communion

Lamb of God — pg. 164, *front of hymnal*

Hymn — no. 320

“The Glory of These Forty Days”

Hymn — no. 608

“Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling”

Prayer After Communion

God of manna and mustard seeds, we came to this Table hungry
and we leave feeling full—full of hope, full of promise, full of what could be.

For we not only found glimpses of you at this Table, but we caught a glimpse of the way
things could be: in a meal where all are welcomed and all are fed.

Is there anything holier than that?

Thank you for nourishing our curiosity alongside our spirit and our conviction.

*Our sending
hymn speaks to
the different
paths we take
through the ups
and downs of life.
What paths will
you seek as we
begin this new
Lenten journey?*

May we always seek you the way you seek after us.

With grateful hearts we pray, amen.

we DEPART to serve the world

Announcements

Sending Hymn — no. 326

“Bless Now, O God, the Journey”

*Blessing & Dismissal

As you leave this place, may God bless you with seeking.

Seek out the hungry. Seek the weary. Seek the good in every person you pass.

Seek out the hopeful. Seek the faithful. Seek God in each of us.

As you seek and as you wonder, may you find what you are looking for.

In the name of our loving God, who is always seeking us, go now in peace. **Amen.**

Postlude — “Trio”

Josef Rheinberger

Acknowledgements

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