

Ash Wednesday Service

Preparation

As is appropriate for a service during Lent, and especially for this service, on the first day of Lent, it incorporates reflective periods of quiet stillness.

The chairs for the service are placed in the round, if at all possible, to create a more personal, face-to-face gathering together.

A small table may be placed within the circle of chairs, draped with a plain purple cloth. A cross and an open Bible may be placed on the table.

An order of service leaflet could be prepared and distributed in order to reduce the amount of material needed by participants.

The participants are divided into two groups, using whatever criterion is preferred, for the reading of the 10 Commandments and the greatest commandments.

The readings given here are all from the NIV.

The reflection, given by the leader of the service, and based on the readings chosen, will highlight the significance of the difference between mere outward show or hypocrisy, condemned by Jesus, and symbolic actions, if done with an appropriate attitude, serving to give expression to our inner spirituality.

At the close of the service, people should be encouraged to leave in silence. This is expressive of our moving with Jesus into the period of his testing and preparation for the cross.

Introduction to the service

Explain that the signing with the ash cross is a voluntary participation. Those who choose not to receive the sign of the cross in ash should remain seated.

Although the traditional symbolic action has the ash cross drawn on the forehead, people will also be given the option of having it drawn on their hand.

Acknowledge that some prayers in the service were composed by the people named in the service leaflet.

A few moments of quiet stillness

Call to worship: "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"
(Mark 1:15)

Opening Hymn: When I survey the Wondrous Cross

Opening Prayer: (Responses in bold print)

Be with us, Spirit of God:

nothing can separate us from your love.

Breath on us, breath of God:

fill us with saving power.

Speak to us, wisdom of God;

bring strength, healing and peace.

A few moments of quiet stillness

The 10 Commandments: (The two groups read these alternately.)

And God spoke all these words:

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.

"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

"Honour your father and your mother.

"You shall not murder.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.

"You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour."

The Greatest Commandments: (The two groups read these alternately.)

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Prayer (by Fran Pratt): (Responses in bold print)

God, we humble ourselves before you.
You are our creator.

We remember that we are dust
And to dust our bodies will someday return.

We have made a mess of things here on earth
Have mercy on us.

Our humility cannot be too great.
Nor can your mercy.

May the repentance that starts in our hearts
Grow outward.

May our inner transformation bring with it
Heaven on earth.

Where violence and murder are no more;
Where injustice is no more;

Where poverty and hunger are no more;
Where pain and prison are no more;

Let us, mere dust,
Join with you in transforming the world.
Amen.

A few moments of quiet stillness

Reading from the Hebrew Bible: Isaiah 58:1-12

Reading from the New Testament: 2 Corinthians 5:20b-21.

Hymn: Be thou My Vision

Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Reflective Presentation:

A few moments of quiet stillness

Confession: (Responses in bold print)

Have mercy on me, O God, from your unfailing love.
Blot out my transgressions, O God, from your great compassion.

Have mercy on me, O God, from your unfailing love.

Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

Have mercy on me, O God, from your unfailing love.

For I know my transgressions; my sin is always before me.
In all my sins I have sinned against you, and done what is evil in your sight.

Have mercy on me, O God, from your unfailing love.

I know that you are justified when you judge me, O God.
I have been sinful right from the start.

Have mercy on me, O God, from your unfailing love.

You have desired faithfulness from the start, and have always taught me wisdom that
I should have followed.

Have mercy on me, O God, from your unfailing love.

Do not cast me from your presence, or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Have mercy on me, O God, from your unfailing love.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Let me hear joy and gladness again; let the bones you have crushed rejoice again.

Have mercy on me, O God, from your unfailing love.

**Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain
me. Amen.**

Signing with the Ash Cross

(Those who wish to receive the ash cross will be invited to stand.)

Leader's Words to Each Person: 'Remember that you are dust, and that to dust you will
return. Turn away from sin, and be faithful to the
Gospel.'

A few moments of quiet stillness

Intercessions (by Ann Siddall):

We pray today for all who are walking a hard journey:

for those whose daily paths encounter barbed wire and guns;
for those who did not want to leave home but were forced to;

for those who set out today in search of food and water;
for those whose journey is shattered by economic hardship;

for those whose journey is marred by pain or despair,
and for those who faithfully journey alongside them;

for those who are making a move and beginning again;
for those who are clinging on to something that has ended;

for those who are being bullied, and for those who are bullying;

for those who have just taken their first breath, and
for those who today will take their last.

May this Lenten journey, with its stories
about the hard places of Jesus' experience,

give strength and courage to all
whose journey is far from easy.

And may it inspire us to risk Christ's Way of love
as we share the journey with other travellers.

We make this prayer in his name. Amen.

The Peace: (Said by all)

The Lord has called us to live in peace;
the peace of the Lord be with you always.

Hymn: Just as I am

A few moments of quiet stillness

Following this, participants will be invited to wipe away the ashes from the forehead or hand of the person to their right, symbolising Jesus wiping away the sins of the repentant through his death and resurrection.

Hymn: Amazing Grace

**The minister will then end the service with a blessing, before
inviting everyone to leave in silence.**