

Sign of Death and Life

Soaring buildings of steel and concrete--these can smolder into ravines of ash. Damp, green forests of moss-cloaked trees can burn into ash-covered skeletal remains. Mountain peaks can detonate from buried, churning cauldrons that carry ash skyward and drop it on meadows and beaches miles away. Fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, sons and daughters--they too give bones and flesh, warm blood and familiar voice over to ash. "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust" says the pastor, standing by a hole in the ground. There is a place like this for all of us.

An uncomfortable gloominess pesters us on this day, Ash Wednesday. Without hesitation the sober announcement finds our ears and more importantly our hearts: "Remember that you are dust." Many of us will be marked on our brows with the same symbol that signed us at our baptism. The sign of the cross will be impressed upon our flesh. However today the imprint is gray ash, the remains of dying embers, and not the oil of anointing for someone freshly risen from baptismal water.

How is it that we come to this place of worship and take on this awfully transformed symbol? The joyous, watery, baptismal birth mark is changed into the fearful, gritty Ash Wednesday death mark. Is there not enough ruin and sorrow in our lives and in our world without welcoming its imprint here in worship?

Yet isn't it precisely here that we need to encounter this sign of mortality? Here, in the shadow of the cross, we can accept this truth. For to honestly face our death is to begin meeting the wonder of life in Christ. "Send me the grace my spirit needs," we pray with Martin Luther (LBW 295), "without it I am nothing." To admit that we are indeed helplessly sinful, sliding toward death, is the first step toward repentance and reclaiming our baptismal birthright.

Welcome to First St. John Lutheran Church on this Ash Wednesday. In the light of our Covid-19 protocols, please review some of our guidelines below.

Masks must be worn. We have some available to take if you don't have one. Some are cloth masks and can be taken home to wash and reuse. There are also disposable masks.

Please do not congregate in the Narthex (entrance area) either as you arrive or leave.

To minimize direct contact, we will use the outside aisles only for entry and exit. The center aisle will be used for communion, special needs, or emergency exit.

Ushers will fill the pews from the front to the back of the church and dismiss from the back to the front. Please follow their directions. We are sorry everyone cannot have their usual seat.

NOTE: We can speak the congregational responses behind our masks. Dr. Tony will provide music. The service will be recorded and published to the website. We are now live streaming the service on our church website, www.firststjohn.com

Elders will wear gloves. You can get a bulletin at the check-in table when you walk in. Please do not leave your bulletin in the pew when you exit; take it home or put it in the recycling bin at the front door.

There is a small wooden church just to the right of the main door when you come in. It has a slot for your offering.

Restrooms are in the church basement. Go to the Narthex (lobby) and take the left set of steps down. The ladies room is at one end of the hallway, and the men's room is at the other. Return to the Narthex using the opposite set of stairs. Please, one person only in the restroom area.

Diaper Changing: A diaper changing table is available in the ladies restroom in the basement of the church.

First St. John Lutheran Church
2471 Seaman St.
Toledo, OH 43605
419-691-7222 or 419-691-9524

Rev. Jerald K. Rayl, Pastor
Dr. Anthony Pattin, Organist

February 24, 2021 11:00 am & 7:00 pm Lent Midweek

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Gardens are places of beauty. Gardens are places of rest. Gardens are places that bring joy to our hearts as we walk through their midst. The Garden of Eden was such a place—of beauty and perfection, of joy and peace. But man could not resist temptation, and the result was a view of the beautiful garden from the outside. No more joy, no more peace, only pain and sorrow, sweat and tears. Today, our journey is from the Garden of Eden (from which we have been exiled) to an even more beautiful garden, the Garden of Everlasting Life. This will not be an easy journey. There will be much stumbling and falling, many bumps and bruises—after all, the world has been infested by sin and all the hazards that go with this reality. A difficult journey, but one that has been taken first by our Lord and Savior Jesus. Because He has first made the journey and suffered in our place, the gates of the new, heavenly garden stand open before us. No more tears, no more sorrow, this garden is our place of perfect rest, joy, and peace.

Prelude

Dr. Pattin

(The Congregation stands)

Opening Hymn “*In the Cross of Christ I Glory*”

No. 324

OPENING SENTENCES

- P: Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; hold not Your peace at my tears!
- C: **For I am a sojourner with You, a guest, like all my fathers. Ps. 39:12**
- P: Thus declares the LORD of hosts: Return to Me, says the LORD of hosts,
- C: **and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. Zech. 1:3**
- P: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
- C: **let him return to the LORD, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. Is. 55:7**

- P: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
- C: **they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.** *Is. 35:10*
- P: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
- C: **as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**
- P: Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears!
- C: **For I am a sojourner with you, a guest, like all my fathers.** *Ps. 39:12*

CONFESSION

- P: We are on a journey from a deserved exile to a gracious promised land. Although we merit nothing, because our heavenly Father promises forgiveness and mercy to all who call on Him for Jesus' sake, let us go to Him, confessing our sin.

(Silence for reflection and self-examination)

- P: Heavenly Father, we are fallen creatures, prone to hiding our faults from one another, yet knowing our sins are laid bare before You.
- C: **Forgive us and clothe us with Christ's own righteousness.**
- P: We have erred and strayed from Your way.
- C: **Forgive us and turn our feet toward the paradise You promise.**
- P: We have attempted to placate Your just demands by our own efforts.
- C: **Forgive us for the sake of Your Son's sacrifice in our stead.**
- P: We have often failed to reflect the new life You granted us in our Baptism.
- C: **Forgive us and drown the old Adam within us.**
- P: We have eaten "forbidden fruit" in our disobedient thinking, speaking, and acting.
- C: **Forgive us and grant us the new life won on the tree of the cross.**
- P: We have failed to trust Your care and protection as we journey through this wilderness.
- C: **Forgive us and accompany us on our pilgrim way.**
- P: Our gracious God, even when we were dead in our trespasses, You made us alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:5). You who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13). May He who began this good work in you bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6)₄

Benediction

P: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up God's countenance upon you and give you peace. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

THE PASSION HISTORY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST Reading — Part 1

CLOSING HYMN “The Old Rugged Cross”

**On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suffering and shame.
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best
For a world of lost sinners was slain.**

**(Refrain)
So I'll cherish the old rugged cross
Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross
And exchange it someday for a crown.**

**To the old rugged cross I will ever be true;
Its shame and reproach gladly bear;
Then He'll call me someday to my home far away,
Where His glory forever I'll Share.
(Refrain)**

Postlude

Dr. Pattin

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Welcome to all who are worshipping with us in the name of Jesus Christ.

ELDERS:

C: Amen.

(The Congregation is seated)

The Service of the Word

First Reading: A reading from the third chapter of Genesis.

After Adam and Eve sinned, God spelled out the results of their disobedience. But He also clothed them and promised that a descendant of Eve would triumph over Satan.

Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

P: O Lord, have mercy on us.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

Second Reading: A reading from the twenty-second chapter of Revelation.—*Here the author provides the description of heaven reflects Eden.*

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

P: Lord, have mercy on us.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

(The Congregation stands for the reading of the Gospel)

Gospel Acclamation (Spoken)

P: Return to the Lord your God, who is gracious and merciful,

C: slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

P: The Gospel according to St. Matthew, Chapter 6.

C: Glory to you, O Lord.

GOSPEL: Matthew 6:19-21

“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.

Gospel Response (*Spoken*)

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

(The Congregation is seated)

Sermon “Garden to Garden: Eden to Heaven”

Pastor Rayl

Hymn “Jerusalem, My Happy Home”

No. 628

Apostles’ Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Offering

Musical Offertory

Dr. Pattin

(The Congregation stands)

The Bidding Prayer (*each petition concludes with:*)

P: O Lord have mercy on us.

C: Thanks be to God.

The Lord’s Prayer (*prayed by all*)

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.

(The Congregation is seated)

P: Let us pray. Merciful God, accompany our journey through these forty days. Renew us in the gift of baptism, that we may provide for those who are poor, pray for those in need, fast from self-indulgence and above all, that we may find our treasure in the life of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

P: Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping

C: That awake we may watch with Christ and asleep we may rest in peace.

P: Lord, now You let Your servant go in peace; Your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which You have prepared in the sight of every people: a light to reveal You to the nations and the glory of Your people Israel.

C: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

P: Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping

C: That awake we may watch with Christ and asleep we may rest in peace.