



liturgies certainly reflect liturgical church traditions and are developed around the seasons of the Christian year. Our actual practice of worship in our local churches is more reflective of our frontier roots in the era of circuit riders, camp meetings and revivals. Consequently, there is a wide variety of styles in the actual worship practices of local congregations.

And so, we often see United Methodist congregations observing Ash Wednesday without using ashes, or observing Lent with no particular emphasis on the traditional disciplines of the season, or celebrating Easter without holding an Easter vigil.

Mayfield has generally fallen into this middle ground. And like a many larger congregations, we do not usually follow the lectionary, preferring instead to develop our own worship schedule around series of sermons based on themes that grow out of every day life and lead us into Scripture for God's word and wisdom.

Tonight, however, we have planned a modified liturgical service for Ash Wednesday. We will use ashes as part of our worship experience and combine together some rituals not usually celebrated on Ash Wednesday. This is likely to be unlike any Ash Wednesday service you have ever been to before. We invite you to participate in this service at whatever level you are able and allow God to meet you wherever that is.

We will have moments like this one throughout the service when we will pause to reflect on the symbols and disciplines of the Lenten season.

The roots of Lent predate the Roman Catholic Church, reaching back to the third and fourth centuries. Originally, Lent was not a 40 day period. Its origins are traced back to three early practices of the Christian Church.

First, in the early church, the two days before Easter were observed as a paschal fast. The fast was broken at the end of the Easter Vigil that lasted through the night before Easter Sunday and climaxed with a service at sunrise, marking the time the women discovered the empty tomb. Gradually, this two-day period of fasting was lengthened to 40 days.

Second, the Early Church developed a catechetical process for persons desiring to become Christians that combined doctrinal training with baptism as the rite of initiation into the Christian faith. In time, the emerging 40 day

season of Lent became the time when catechumens were prepared for their baptism and the baptismal service became part of the Easter Vigil.

Third, as in every generation, there were persons in the early church who had been baptized and then fell back into serious sin. The church developed a process whereby penitent sinners could seek a second conversion through confession and penance, and their restoration to the faith was celebrated with a renewal of their baptismal vows. In time, this renewal was joined with the baptism of new catechumens at the conclusion of Lent at the Easter Vigil.

From these roots have sprung our contemporary Lenten traditions. This season's association with the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness of Judea, and its emphasis on repentance, self-denial, and spiritual preparation make it a time of deep significance. But many Christians miss the key event that is so important to our understanding of Lent and that is baptism. The penitential aspects of Lent are meaningless unless our confession of sin is accompanied by a true turning from sin to the Savior whose forgiveness and gift of new life we celebrate in baptism.

Tonight's service will lead us through the entire Lenten experience in one evening however, do not shortchange yourself by thinking that tonight's service is a shortcut to baptism. Rather, look upon this night as a review of the map of the spiritual journey that lies ahead of us over the next six weeks, and leave here tonight with a sense of anticipation and excitement about the journey we are about to take.

**Old Testament Reading: *Isaiah 58:1-12, NIV***

**Reader 1**

**“Shout it aloud, do not hold back.**

**Reader 2**

**Raise your voice like a trumpet.**

**Reader 3**

**Declare to my people their rebellion  
and to the house of Jacob their sins.**

**Reader 1**

**For day after day they seek me out;  
they seem eager to know my ways,  
as if they were a nation that does what is right  
and has not forsaken the commands of its God.**

**Reader 2**

**They ask me for just decisions  
and seem eager for God to come near them.**

**Reader 3**

**‘Why have we fasted,’ they say,  
‘and you have not seen it?  
Why have we humbled ourselves,  
and you have not noticed?’  
Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please  
and exploit all your workers.  
Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,  
and in striking each other with wicked fists.**

**Reader 2**

**You cannot fast as you do today  
and expect your voice to be heard on high.  
Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,  
only a day for a man to humble himself?  
Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed  
and for lying on sackcloth and ashes?  
Is that what you call a fast,  
a day acceptable to the LORD?**

**Reader 1**

**Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?**

**Reader 3**

**Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-**

**when you see the naked, to clothe him,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?**

**Reader 1**

**Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness will go before you,  
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.  
Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;  
you will cry for help, and he will say: 'Here am I.'**

**Reader 2**

**If you do away with the yoke of oppression,  
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,  
and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,  
then your light will rise in the darkness,  
and your night will become like the noonday.**

**Reader 3**

**The LORD will guide you always;  
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land  
and will strengthen your frame.**

**Reader 2**

**You will be like a well-watered garden,  
like a spring whose waters never fail.**

**Reader 1**

**Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins  
and will raise up the age-old foundations;  
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,  
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.**

**The Symbol of Ashes**

From the time of the Old Testament, ashes have been an ancient symbol of repentance. The prophets of old often urged an unrepentant Israel to mourn

their sins and put on sackcloth and ashes, confess their sins and return to the Lord. Jeremiah begged,

### **Reader 1**

**“O my people, put on sackcloth and roll in ashes; mourn with bitter wailing as for an only son, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us,” Daniel reported:** (Jeremiah 6:25-27).

### **Reader 2**

**So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes** (Daniel 9:2-4).

### **Reader 3**

**Jesus showed his acquaintance with this ancient practice when he condemned the cities of Korazin and Bethsaida for rejecting his ministry:**

**“Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and in ashes”** (Matthew 11:12).

The marking of our foreheads with ashes is a sign of our repentance of our sins. It is not a sign of our thinking that repentance is a good idea. Nor is it a meaningless ritual that we observe out of religious duty. If we receive the ashes at all it is because we are actively repenting of our sins.

It is also thought that ashes are meant to remind us of our own mortality. Some Ash Wednesday liturgies include the words “remember that you are dust” to be said as worshipers receive the ashen mark of the cross on their foreheads. Thus we are reminded of the day when we will stand before God and be judged. Here again, the powerful symbolism of Baptism is called upon. In baptism we are buried with Christ so that we may be raised with Christ. To prepare well for the day we die, we must die now to sin and rise to new life in Christ.

And, like the penitents of the early church, being marked with ashes at the beginning of Lent indicates our recognition of the need for a deeper conversion of our lives during this season of renewal.

Many of the Psalms are penitential. On behalf of the whole community of God's wayward people, the psalmists repent of sin and cry out for God's mercy. Because their words so often mirror our own experience, we use the words of Psalm 51 to express our own lament for our sin and rebellion against the Lord of creation. As our lay reader comes to lead us in the responsive reading of Psalm 51, please turn to it your program and make your responses as printed in bold print.

**A Psalm: 51:1-17, NIV**

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;

**according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.**

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

**For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.**

Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are proved right when you speak  
and justified when you judge.

**Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.**

Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;  
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

**Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.**

Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

**Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquity.**

Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

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

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

**Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will turn back to you.**

Save me from bloodguilt, O God,  
the God who saves me,  
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

**O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.**

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;  
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

**The sacrifices of God are a  
broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart,  
O God, you will not despise.**

**Receiving of Ashes** *(administered by the pastor(s))*

As we sing a great modern hymn of repentance, we invite all who will to come forward and receive the ashen mark of the cross on your forehead as we, your pastors, encourage you to repent of your sins and be faithful to the gospel. Come up the side aisle and return to your seats using the center aisle. The words of the hymn will be on the screen (or are in the bulletin) so

you can participate in singing even as you come forward and receive the ashes. Let's stand as we sing so all may have an opportunity to come. The ushers will not direct you. Just come.

**Hymn No. 357                      "Just As I Am"**

**The Practice of Giving Something Up**

Art by its nature is meant to confront, provoke, even upset or offend in order to make a point. When contemporary artists began painting pictures of Jesus laughing or with his hair swept freely by the wind of the Sea of Galilee, some found these portraits shocking, irreverent or offensive. Yet the artists were confronting a church that had become far too serious about too many things with a reminder that Jesus was as much a man as he was divine.

Research on the internet on the season of Lent yielded a portrait of Jesus that appeared to have been painted by a contemporary artist. It depicted him with the crown of thorns upon his head and a look of dread upon his face. Someone with wayward talents in Photoshop had superimposed a caption over this painting and posted it on a website the search had unearthed. The caption I am about to quote may make you laugh, or may make you angry. Your first reaction may be "How awful." You may even think it is sacrilegious. But if you get past your initial shock, you will realize that the author of the caption has actually made an important and uncomfortably penetrating point. Here is the caption. In the shadow of the cross, he has Jesus saying:

This is going to hurt like hell, but at least 2000 years from now people will remember me by eating fish on Fridays and giving up candy for forty days.

For many older Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, the first thought that Lent brings is giving something up. The standard for many is to give up candy or soft drinks, or some other mild vice that isn't so good for you. This passes for our version of self-denial. But even this level of sacrifice seems so daunting to many that they have to have one last day of unlimited frolicking on Fat Tuesday before they submit to the rigorous discipline of giving up cookies or going without some other mild convenience for 40 days. It is hard for me to imagine how God could not be offended by our attitudes.

One father tried to get his boys to catch a larger vision of Lent than just giving up on candy by urging them to give up some habit of sin that marked their lives. One of the young boys promised to give up fighting with his brother during Lent. About half-way through the season the father asked his boys how they were doing with their promises. The one who vowed to stop fighting said, “I’m doing pretty good, Dad, but I can hardly wait until Easter.”

Like many of us, he had only partly understood the purpose of Lenten “giving up.” Lent is about conversion, turning our lives more completely over to Christ and his way of life. That always involves giving up sin in some form. The goal is not just to abstain from sin for the 40 days of Lent, but to root sin out of our lives forever. Conversion means leaving behind an old way of living and acting in order to embrace a new life and a new way in Christ.

For catechumens—candidates for baptism—Lent is a period intended to bring their conversion to completion.

For penitents—candidates for restoration—it is a time meant to help them be converted again to a vital faith.

For all Christians, Lent is a time to seriously explore surrendering more of our lives to Christ than we have before, living more freely from sin than we have before, and finding more ways to serve God’s kingdom than we have before.

Lenten “giving up” really needs to be about “giving up” sin—allowing God to break its grip on us at a deeper level. And the Lenten “taking up” that we Protestants have tended to emphasize needs to be about adding to our responsibilities in God’s kingdom work.

The state of our physical, mental, or spiritual health may necessitate our giving up candy or television or some form of recreation, but unless these things are besetting sins, they’re not what we should be giving up for Lent.

**An Epistle Reading: *2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10, NIV***

We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says,

“In the time of my favor I heard you,  
and in the day of salvation I helped you.”

I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

### **Scrutinies: Examining Our Lives**

To scrutinize something means to examine it closely. Lent is a season when we are called upon by our faith to examine our lives closely for whatever obstacles keep us from living life in all the fullness of the Gospel's promise. Socrates, one of our greatest philosophers, said that the unexamined life is a life not worth living. Yet often we draw back from scrutiny because we fear it will bring harm rather than healing. We dread judgment, condemnation, and rejection. What God promises is that when we honestly identify and confront our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us and to give us greater power to overcome our sins. Instead of more brokenness, genuine self-scrutiny can release to us God's deep healing in our lives.

Lent reminds us that Christian conversion is not a one-time decision to follow Christ. It is a life-long process by which we continually grow closer to God through scrutiny of our life, penitence, forgiveness and other spiritual disciplines that enrich and deepen our relationship with God. Sin has infected our hearts. Scrutinizing our life in the light of God's word identifies concrete issues that can then become the focus of our intercessory

prayers. Naming the ways that evil continues to prevent us from living the gospel fully brings into focus the attitudes and behaviors that we most need to give up, not just during the 40 days of lent, but from now on. All of us need to spend some time reflecting on what obstacles to living the Gospel exist in our own life.

Taking seriously this dynamic of scrutiny and conversion gives us a richer perspective on Lenten “giving up.” We need to approach the season of Lent asking ourselves what needs to change in our lives if we are to live in obedience to the teachings of Jesus? Our journey through these days should be a movement ever closer to Christ and to the way of life he has exemplified for us.

**The Gospel Reading: *Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21, NIV* Don**

[Jesus said,] “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust

destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

## **Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving [Coralee](#)**

In the Catholic tradition there are three pillars or disciplines of the Lenten season. They are Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving. Each one is linked to baptismal renewal.

***Prayer:*** Lent is a time when we are encouraged to spend more time in prayer as a primary way of drawing closer to the Lord. The pace of life crowds in on all our friendships to the point that we are not able to spend the time required to maintain, renew and enjoy those relationships. The peripheral busy-ness of life can keep us from the core business of life, which is pursuing our relationship with God. We need to pray for God’s grace so that we may live in a faithful relationship with him through Christ. We need to pray for others who are struggling to find their way into a meaningful faith. And we need to pray for those who are alienated from the Christian community that they may be reconciled to God and their brothers and sisters in Christ.

***Fasting:*** The Early Church fasted intensely for the two days before Easter. The fast began on Good Friday and extended through Holy Saturday so that when the day of Resurrection dawned the celebration of the Risen Christ would be experienced both spiritually and physically as the fast was broken. This two-day period, known as the paschal fast, predated Lent as we know it.

Fasting has several dimensions. It is sometimes practiced as a way to develop self-control. It is often seen as an aid to prayer, as the pangs of hunger remind us of our hunger for God. A third dimension of fasting was emphasized by the prophet Isaiah who insisted that fasting without changing our behavior is not pleasing to God. Isaiah 58:6-7 records these words of the prophet:

*This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the*

*oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them,  
and not turning your back on your own.*

Fasting should be linked to our concern for those who are forced to fast by their poverty, those who suffer from the injustices of our economic and political structures, those who are in need for any reason. Fasting is linked to living out our baptism. By our baptism we are charged with the responsibility of showing Christ's love to the world, especially to those in need. Fasting can help us realize the suffering that so many people in our world experience every day, and it should lead us to greater efforts to alleviate that suffering. Abstaining from certain foods, such as meat, creates a spiritual link between us and those whose sparse diets seldom, if ever, provide them with meat for their meals.

*Almsgiving:* Financial contributions to alleviate the suffering of the poor is a basic way to fulfill our baptismal commitment to care for others. Works of charity and the promotion of justice are integral parts of the Christian way of life that we began at our baptism.

**Offertory**                    **“When You Prayed Beneath the Tree”**

**The Prayer of Confession**

*Most merciful God,  
We confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done,  
and by what we have failed to do.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart.  
We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,  
have mercy on us and forgive us;  
that we may delight in your will,  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your Name. AMEN.*

## **Words of Reassurance**

Leader:

If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—  
Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and  
not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.

—*1 John 2:1b-2, NIV*

## **Congregation:**

**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins  
and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

—*1 John 1:9, NIV*

## **Holy Communion**

### **Affirmation of Faith: The Nicene Creed (Standing)**

**We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father.  
Through Him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
He came down from heaven:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.  
For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
He suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day He rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
He ascended into heaven**

**and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and His kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father.  
With the Father and the Son He is worshiped and glorified.  
He has spoken through the Prophets.  
We believe in one holy universal and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. AMEN.**

**Hymn No. 382                    “Have Thine Own Way, Lord”**

### **Prayers**

Lord God, Maker and King of the universe, to whom all honor, glory, praise, and worship are due; it is a right and proper thing, at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances, to give you our most hearty thanks and praise, especially for your Son Jesus Christ, who died to take away our sins and the sins of the entire world. He rose again from the dead and sits at your right hand where He rules over all things, including the things we cannot understand.

**Lord, forgive us for neglecting the reading and study of your holy Word. Free us from any fondly held but vain opinions and fill us afresh with the Spirit of Truth, that we might delight in your holy Word, that we might study it and reflect upon it, and see you within it.**

### **Lenten Commitment and Baptism Renewal**

We have traced the rhythm of Lent tonight. It begins with a contrite heart and a penitent spirit, adopts spiritual disciplines on a higher than normal level, prepares catechumens for their baptismal commitment and sinners for reconciliation and culminates with the Easter Vigil, the baptismal service and worship at sunrise on Easter Sunday. With institutional precision, the season itself models the path toward faith. But in real life persons join this path at different points and travel it at different speeds. For some the slow pace is welcome as they take full advantage of the opportunities to study and

meditate and cultivate their faith in God. For others, whose conviction of sin is deep and need for reconciliation and its signs are urgent, six weeks can be an eternity.

The story is often told of the time the great evangelist D. L. Moody was preaching a revival in a major city. The auditorium was packed to capacity. He preached a thunderous sermon that convicted many people of their sin and their need for a savior. But for some reason, he decided not to give an invitation at the close of the service that night. He thought the message he had preached had been so powerful it was sure to bring even more people back the next night when he would invite them to give their lives to Christ and there would be a great harvest of souls. But late in the night, after everyone had gone home, the auditorium caught fire and burned to the ground. There was no next night. Moody forever regretted his decision and the unknown number of persons who might have come to Christ had he given the invitation the night of the fire weighed heavily upon his heart.

You did not come here tonight by accident. God arranged your affairs in such a way that your feet brought you to this place. As we have worked our way through this service, your heart may have been opened to the purpose God had for you here tonight. His grace is ready and available now: to bring you to Christ; to restore you to fellowship with the church; to break the power some besetting sin has over you; to put you to work doing his Kingdom's work in your life.

The ashes on your brow represent whatever obstacles may be keeping you from fully realizing a life that has been set free and empowered by the good news of Jesus Christ. If you would like to commit your life to God tonight through faith in his son, Jesus Christ, I invite you to come forward in just a moment. If you would like to be reconciled with the body of Christ, the church, letting go of old sins that have separated you from God's people, I invite you to come forward tonight. If you would like to celebrate your life in Christ and symbolically express your thankful joy for his love and mercy, I invite you to come forward.

If you come we will celebrate the cleansing power of God's grace over our sins by washing the ashes from your forehead, and then you may take another step forward and renew your baptism commitment as I mark the sign of the cross on your forehead with water from the Jordan River.

Solo: "If You Search with All Your Heart"

Silence

*Pray thanksgivings and petitions for yourselves and others.*

**Congregation Prayer:**

**We do not ask these things on our own authority, for before you we have none, but in the name of your only begotten Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in your glory, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, as one God, now and forever, AMEN.**

*Conclude with the Lord's Prayer:*

**Our Father, who is in heaven,  
Hallowed be your name.  
Your Kingdom come, your will be done,  
On earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Keep us from being tempted beyond our ability to prevail,  
And deliver us from evil,  
For yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory,  
Forever, AMEN.**

Hymn "I Surrender All"

Silence

Depart