

An

# Ash Wednesday

Reflection Guide

ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE • FEBRUARY 17, 7:30PM

## ASH WEDNESDAY 2021

Welcome to our Ash Wednesday meditation. Today begins our forty-day journey to Easter. It sets the believer on a sobering time of self-examination and repentance, to wait upon and prepare for the renewal given by God's Spirit in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In preparation for Lent, we invite you to use this day for reflection and prayer, ending with the Ash Wednesday Zoom service this evening. To guide you through this day of reflection, you will find a meditation to read three times today; **morning**, **noontday**, and **evening**. As you move throughout your day, ponder from time to time on the reading and what it means to you as you prepare for a holy and meaningful Lent. If you have your palm cross from last year, please burn it, leaving the ashes in a bowl on your dining table. And you might light a candle as well.

*Looking forward to seeing you Wednesday February 17, 7:30pm*





ASH WEDNESDAY:  
A MORNING MEDITATION

# GETTING STARTED

## OPENING PRAYER

*by* ANGELA ASHWIN

Lord, take my small offering of self-denial this Lent,  
as a sign of my great longing for you.

I hunger for your presence in my life, and I thirst  
for your love. I hunger for justice for those who are  
wronged and oppressed, and I thirst for your peace.  
I hunger for a glimpse of your glory, and I thirst for  
your stillness in my heart.

God of giving, God of longing, God of pain,  
I hunger for you.

*Amen*



# MEDITATION

by VINITA HAMPTON WRIGHT

***How do you prepare for Lent?***

***How have you prepared in the past?***

***What are your ideas about what should happen during Lent?***

We have the traditional practices of praying, fasting, and almsgiving. So, we pray more than usual, or we pray with different emphases. We eat smaller or fewer meals or give up a favourite food or drink group. We give more of our resources or give them specifically to special works of mercy during Lent.

Prayer, fasting, and charitable giving continue to be quite good practices during Lent or at any time.

But, you might think, how do I prepare myself for this season? What needs to happen within so that I can practice with more integrity and intention whatever I'm doing on the outside? There are plenty of ideas for actions and practices during Lent; coming up with ideas usually is not the problem. But we don't want to do anything simply to be doing it, even if it's a good thing. We don't want to make a list of merciful works so that we can place a checkmark beside each one as we accomplish it.

It's good to have a plan for doing. It's also good to have a plan for being.

How do I want to be during Lent this year? More quiet and thoughtful? More open to God's desires? Better able to sit with people who need me? More attentive to sacred readings? Do I need to be more compassionate toward my own fears and failings? Do I need to become more courageous about using the gifts God has given me?

On this Ash Wednesday, try one or more of these suggestions.

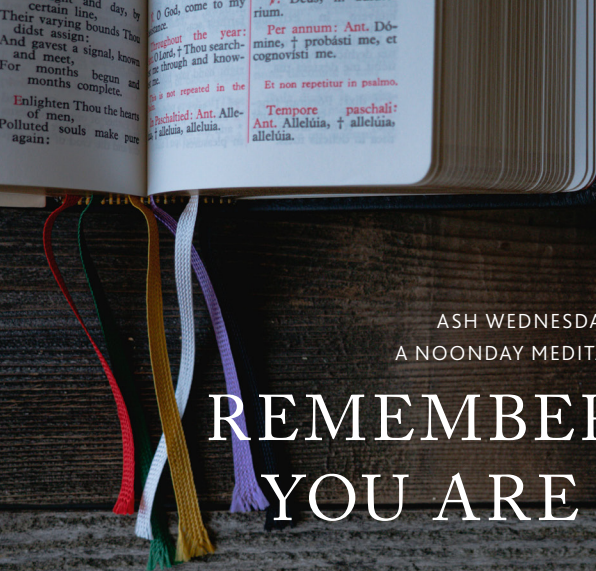
† **Ask God, "What does my soul need?"** Just ask, and wait quietly. Because we're very good at fooling ourselves about how we're doing, it might take several days of praying this question before we're truly open and humble enough to know the answer.

† **Ask God, "What about my life makes you happy?"** Yes, when God looks at your life, some parts of it—perhaps many aspects of it—bring joy to God's heart. Think of how your children or grandchildren or other people close to you make you happy. God is in relationship with you, which means that your sins grieve God's heart, but also that your growth and love and freedom and kindness bring joy to God of the universe. Again, you will probably need to pray this a few times before you are willing to consider that you give God pleasure, that you make God happy in any way. Stick with this question and keep listening.

† **Tell God, and yourself, "I want to be open to the graces of this Lenten season."** Maybe you're not open right now, or you're not as open and willing as you'd like to be or think you should be. What else is new? We can always open our lives a bit more, let go of more stuff, listen better, and do more quickly and passionately what we know helps nurture God's kingdom on earth.

## CLOSING PRAYER

**Holy God, whose Spirit drives us into the wilderness to confront our priorities with a holy fast; grant that as we are about to do battle with our demons and the power of evil, we may be defended by our grace through Jesus Christ. Amen. and ever. Amen.**



ASH WEDNESDAY:  
A NOONDAY MEDITATION

# REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE DUST

## OPENING PRAYER

God of all, in your love and goodness,  
you have taught us to overcome our sins with prayer, fasting,  
and generosity; accept our Lenten disciplines,  
and when we fall by our weakness, raise us up by your  
unfailing mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen

## MEDITATION

*by* DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

***Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. (Joel 2:12-13, NRSV)***

I would rather wear the smudge on my forehead than to admit its residence upon my soul. In a place where self-confidence is rewarded and any sign of weakness or emotional predisposition is held suspect, it is difficult to consider actually following the advice of the prophet



to return to the Lord with fasting, with weeping and with mourning. It is, however, acceptable — maybe even fashionable to appear in public with a dirty forehead as a sign that I have religion. It is amazing how the symbols of piety, sackcloth and ashes, have been transformed into mask that hides me from myself and circumvents the intent of Ash Wednesday.

Blow the trumpet in Zion, the prophet said. Not the trumpet that signals advance to war, or the trumpet that celebrates victory, but the one that warns trembling penitents that the day of the Lord is coming. Blow the trumpet that warns a penitent like me to wear the smudge of ashes long after her face has been washed and to admit the smudge on the one place that matters to God, her heart.

Blow the trumpet in Zion, the prophet said, and sanctify a fast (Joel 2:15). Hear the sounds of grumbling need in a world where few are filled — and where we are overfilled. Today I am called to push away from the voracious consumption of everything in my path, for at least a little while, in hopes that I might realize something about the equitable distribution of the world's resources before the fast is over.

Rend your hearts and not your garments, the prophet said (Joel 2:13). The gift of the day is personal reflection, a season of confession, and change. Start the arduous journey from shadow to substance, from ritual to reality, from façade to faith. Today, choose the harder course. It is easier to buy new clothing than to mend a soul.

Remember, you are dust, and rejoice.

## CLOSING PRAYER

**Be near me Lord, help me, by your Holy Spirit, to feel right conviction and repentance for my sin.**

**Help me, by your Spirit, to have the strength to overcome all that pulls me away from you. Lord, as I begin this year's Lenten Journey, turn my attention to the things that matter most to you.**

**Amen**





ASH WEDNESDAY: AN EVENING MEDITATION

# REPENTANCE

## OPENING PRAYER

*by* ANGELA ASHWIN

Lord, you brought about our redemption through Jesus Christ to restore us to fellowship with you. Today we acknowledge you as our Creator and Redeemer. We acknowledge the frailty of our lives.

In these days of mercy, make us quiet and prayerful; in these days of challenge, make us stronger in you. In these days of emptiness, take possession of us. In these days of waiting, open our hearts to the mystery of your cross.

Work in us, we pray, a spirit of true humility and fervor.  
Amen



# MEDITATION

by BRANDON STEENBOCK—BREAD FOR BEGGARS

## ***"Remember that you are dust."***

Year after year on Ash Wednesday my pastor would say those words as he marked my forehead with ashes. Silently I and my fellow worshipers would walk away, thoughts heavy contemplating the sins and failures that weigh us down, and the great mercy of a God who would forgive one such as me. In the years since, I have only come to appreciate that sentiment all the more, as year after year I see more clearly that no effort on my part can ever satisfy the Law's righteous demands.

When I was young I didn't really understand repentance. I don't know if it's just an immature understanding or a consequence of how we teach it, but I had this impression that repentance was about making sure I said I was sorry for my sins and trying really hard to not do them again. And if I didn't repent, I thought, God would not forgive me.

That line of thinking can only lead to the misguided belief that I actually can do it, that I'm actually capable of being sorry enough and doing it right. Such self-righteous sentiments. The reality is far grimmer – I fail completely, both at my false notion of repentance and at accomplishing true repentance. My sorrow over my sin will always be tainted with self-absorption, be it either feeling good about how bad I feel about myself, or feeling bad about how not really sorry I am, or feeling regretful at the idea of giving up my pet sin. And my best attempts at doing better will never amount to anything.

I've learned this – true repentance is not something I do.

Yes, I want to confess my sins to God, with sorrow over them. Yes, I want to ask for his help to amend my life. Those are the marks of repentance, the way it manifests in my life. But the essence of true repentance is simply this – to know that I am dust. To acknowledge that I am completely hopeless. To admit my absolute brokenness. To understand that even in my brokenness, some part of me still grasps feebly at self-righteousness not because I can succeed, but because I fear the truth that I cannot. True repentance is to see that fear for what it is – the natural state of the soul separated from God by sin.

True repentance is to remember that I am dust. That I am ashes. That I am a sinner.

That I need Jesus.



I can't even summon up true repentance on my own. It is granted to me as a gift of mercy by the one before whom I must bow. He grants it so that I will no longer rely on my own efforts but fall completely on him.

This is where I find the meaning of repentance. It is rest for my soul. I can do nothing, so I look to the one who has done everything. Jesus has done it right where I did it wrong. Jesus has taken my guilt, where no amount of apology to God could have relieved it.

Jesus has washed me clean, and in repentance, I find peace as I kneel before his cross and let his spirit cover me.

On this day of ashes, I bow before him and acknowledge that I am dust. I say with the thief on the cross, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he will.

## CLOSING PRAYER

**Blessed are you, O Lord our God, the shepherd of Israel,  
their pillar of cloud by day, their pillar of fire by night;**

**In these forty days you lead us into the desert of repentance,  
that in this pilgrimage of prayer, we might learn to be your  
people once more. In fasting and service, you bring us back  
to your heart. You open our eyes to your presence in the  
world and you free our hands to lead others to the radiant  
splendour of your mercy.**

**Be with us in these journey days, for without you, we are lost  
and will perish. To you alone be dominion and glory for ever  
and ever.**

**Amen**