

## Why Ash Wednesday and Lent?

Today is "Ash Wednesday," the beginning of the traditional church season of Lent. Lent is a fast season, traditionally set aside as a time of penitence and abstinence, a forty-day period of self-denial and meditation on the cross. How depressing, we might think, to spend forty days every year meditating on the cross, thinking about our sins, fasting. Don't we want to be more upbeat? Aren't Christians supposed to be happy? As a historical matter, the churches that have excluded Lent have not replaced it with a permanent atmosphere of joy. Reformed churches abolished Lent early on, and at the same time suppressed popular amusements and festivals: "In Scotland," for example, "from the mid-1570s on, there was a sustained attack on the celebration of Christmas, Midsummer, and other festivals with singing, dancing, bonfires and plays" (Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, p. 219). This was not an exclusively "Puritan" trend. During the 17th century, Catholics in Madrid closed the theaters, just as Protestants in London did, and Orthodox reformers pursued a similar program in Russia. In Reformed churches, the suppression of Lent has been simultaneous with the suppression of Carnival and other seasons of playful joy. Suppression of Lent did not produce perpetual Easter; it produced a perpetual Lent. I'm not suggesting a direct cause-and-effect. But I am suggesting that there is wisdom in setting aside a specific period for mourning, self-examination, and fasting. We acknowledge Lent in the same way and for the same reason we have a time of confession at the beginning of each worship service. There is a time for lament over sins; there is a time for mourning our own depravity. But lament and mourning ought not choke out rejoicing in the goodness of God. When the Lenten spirit is not given its due, it has threatened to engulf the whole year. The Lenten spirit is part of the church's life, and if we don't wear ashes and purple [or black] for forty days, we might well end up wearing them for 365.

*Excerpt from "Why Lent?" by Peter Leithart*

## The King's Chapel

— A CONGREGATION OF THE COMMUNION OF REFORMED EVANGELICAL CHURCHES —

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## ORDER OF WORSHIP FOR Ash Wednesday February 22, 2012

— LENTEN SEASON —

“...for you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.”

— Genesis 3:19 —

### CALL — The Lord Calls Us into His Presence

- ◆ PASTOR: Let us worship God! We are gathered in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
- ALL: **Amen!**
- PASTOR: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!
- ALL: **May the Lord our God favor you!**
- PASTOR: Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for we shall praise him, our help and our God.
- ALL: **Amen!**

◆ HYMN OF PROCESSION

*“Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”  
Hymn #53*

◆ CONGREGATION STANDS

◆ PASTOR: Brothers and sisters in Christ, every year at Easter, we celebrate our redemption through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lent is a time to prepare for this celebration and to practice with discipline daily repentance, our dying and rising in union with Jesus Christ. We begin this season by acknowledging our need for repentance and mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us pray ... *(Pastor prays a prayer...)*

ALL: **Amen!**

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### CONFESSION — The Lord Cleanses And Restores Us

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● PASTOR: Dearly beloved brethren, the scriptures command us to acknowledge and confess our sins. Our whole salvation is to be found in him, who was crucified and raised for us. When Jesus was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but committed himself to the Father who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we having died to sin, might live for righteousness. By his stripes we are healed and by his death we are made alive. For we like sheep have gone astray, but now have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Like the prodigal son, we were lost, but now have been found. Like Bartimaeus, we were blind, but now we see. Because Christ died for our sins, let us therefore confess our sins as His people and claim his promise of forgiveness and renewal.

PASTOR: O God the Father of heaven, have mercy upon us miserable sinners.

ALL: **O God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us miserable sinners.**

PASTOR: O God the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father

◆ CONGREGATION STANDS      ● CONGREGATION IS SEATED

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### COMMISSION — The Lord Blesses Us and Sends Us

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◆ HYMN OF ADVANCE

*“Lead on, O King Eternal”*

*Hymn #580*

BENEDICTION

PASTOR: May the peace of Christ be with you. He was tempted in every way as we are, yet did not sin. By his grace we are able to triumph over every evil, and to live no longer for ourselves alone, but for him who died for us and rose again. Go, therefore, in the favor of the Father, the righteousness of Christ Jesus the Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit, putting to death the misdeeds of the flesh and becoming more than conquerors through him who lives and reigns evermore. Amen.

ALL: **Amen!**

ALL: **RESPONSIVE READING: Trinity Hymnal, P. 816**

PASTOR: From the Second Epistle to the Corinthians

ALL: **Thanks be to God.**

◆ PASTOR: From the Gospel of Matthew

ALL: **Praise be to You, Lord Jesus Christ!**

● **HOMILY** *Rev. Troy Greene*

◆ **HYMN OF RESPONSE** *“There is a Fountain Filled with  
Blood”*

*Hymn #253*

● **INVITATION** *Rev. Troy Greene*

### **The Imposition Of Ashes In The Sign Of The Cross**

*Those who desire to receive ashes may come to the front,  
receive the mark of ashes, and then return to their seats.*

#### ● **PRAYERS**

PASTOR: God, you created us out of the dust of the earth. Grant that these ashes may be to us a sign of our mortality and repentance, that we may remember that it is only by your gracious gift that we are given everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

ALL: **Amen.**

PASTOR: May all of us learn to live our whole lives under the sign of the cross, being true and faithful to the Lord who has purchased us by the price of his own blood and who ever lives to make intercession for us.

ALL: **Amen.**

ALL: **O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, one God in three Persons, have mercy upon us miserable sinners.**

PASTOR: Remember not, Lord God, our offenses, nor the offenses of our forefathers; restrain from taking vengeance on our sins; spare us, good Lord, spare your people, whom you have redeemed with the most precious blood of your Son, and be not angry with us forever.

ALL: **Spare us, good Lord.**

PASTOR: We have sinned against you, gracious Father, by breaking the good and holy law that you have given to us. We are guilty of sins of omission and commission; we are guilty of sins in body and soul; we are guilty of sins individually and corporately. Our only plea is your mercy, revealed to us in the death and resurrection of your Son and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

ALL: **Spare us, good Lord.**

PASTOR: We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.

ALL: **Have mercy upon us, Lord.**

PASTOR: We have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit.

ALL: **Have mercy upon us, Lord.**

PASTOR: We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness: the pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives,

ALL: **We confess to you Lord.**

PASTOR: Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our  
exaltation of other people

ALL: **We confess to you Lord.**

PASTOR: Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work,

ALL: **We confess to you Lord.**

PASTOR: Our lustful and impure thoughts, words, and deeds,

ALL: **We confess to you Lord.**

PASTOR: Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,

ALL: **We confess to you Lord.**

PASTOR: Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done: for our blindness to human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,

ALL: **Accept our repentance, Lord.**

PASTOR: For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us,

ALL: **Accept our repentance, Lord.**

PASTOR: Restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart from us;

ALL: **Favorably hear us, for your mercy is great.**

PASTOR: Accomplish in us the work of your salvation,

ALL: **That we may show forth your glory in the world.**

PASTOR: By the cross and passion of your Son our Lord,

ALL: **Bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.**

PASTOR: O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,

ALL: **Have mercy upon us.**

most of all, save us from your wrath, through the Lord Jesus Christ; and grant that in all our troubles we may put our whole trust and confidence in your mercy, and evermore serve you in holiness and purity, living our whole lives to your honor and glory.

ALL: **Grant, we ask you, merciful Lord, to your faithful people, pardon and peace; that we may be cleansed from all of our sins and serve you with an undivided heart; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

◆ ABSOLUTION AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS

PASTOR: Arise and hear the good news of God's forgiveness!

Jesus Christ came to save sinners. The Father did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that through him, the world might be saved.

Out of the depths, the Lord has heard your cry. He marks your iniquities no longer. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

ALL: **Amen!**

**CONSECRATION**  
The Lord Accepts Us Into His Presence and Teaches Us

◆ HYMN OF ASCENT *"Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven"*  
Hymn #76

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

● SCRIPTURE READING

PASTOR: From the Book of Genesis

◆ CONGREGATION STANDS      ● CONGREGATION IS SEATED