



St. Thomas United Church
Open Hands – Open Hearts – Open Minds

ASH WEDNESDAY 2021

Adapted from "Again and Again" 2021 Lent Resource from sanctifiedart.org

INTRODUCTION: The beginning of Lent brings a new invitation—an invitation into a deeper life of faith, an invitation to renewed spirituality, and an invitation into deeper awareness of God and self. This liturgy is designed to carve out space for personal reflection and intention setting at the start, knowing that the more honest we are with our hopes for this season, the more meaningful this season can become.

Supplies Needed:

- A candle and lighter or matches
- A Bible and pen
- Printed copies of Ash Wednesday doodle page, one for each participant (*attached*)
- A device to watch the online video
- A journal (*optional*)

Tips for Young Families:

- Invite your kids to have a hands-on role in this liturgy by having them collect the needed supplies from around the house (pens, Bible, candle, lighter, computer, etc), and inviting them to light the candle to set the space.
- Before you begin the liturgy, invite your children to create a special place for you all to sit and reflect. They can make a comfortable fort out of pillows for you to sit on the floor, or they can gather all the supplies needed to gather around the table.

SET THE SPACE: The year 2020 taught us just how much our space matters. Many of us realized just how holy our sanctuaries are for us when we were unable to physically gather within them. However, this season has also reminded us that God does not reside in any one place, for God is everywhere—and God promises to draw near to us wherever we may be. And so, as you begin, we invite you to mark your space so that your soul knows: this is holy ground. To mark your sacred space, we suggest lighting a candle. Maybe find a pillow on the floor to sit on or settle yourself into your favourite chair. Brew some tea, turn on some music that moves your spirit. Gather your supplies (*listed above*). Most importantly, turn your phone notifications off so that you can truly be present.

Take a few deep breaths in and out. Repeat to yourself: *I am here. God is here.*

This space is holy ground.

OPENING PRAYER

Creator God, there is a stirring in us that won't let go.

It stirs in us like the wind stirs leaves - inviting us to move.

*When we are quiet, we know the invitation is
the Holy Spirit, dancing love awake in us.*

*So we are here. And we are still. And we are quiet.
And on this first day of Lent, we seek to draw near.
As we hear your scripture read aloud,
Stir us awake. Gratefully we pray, Amen.*

“INVITED” A POEM BY SARAH ARE

*I like to imagine that each year,
God invites me to a party.
God drops me a note that says,
“No gifts, casual dress. Come just as you are.”*

*I like to imagine that I am brave enough to go.
I like to imagine that I decide that I am worth it.
This was no pity invite,
there is no obligatory postage.
God wants me there.*

*So I get myself together,
smudged glasses, sensitive ego, wrinkled shirt, and all.
I ring the doorbell a few minutes late on account of the fact that
I lost my keys twice trying to get out the door,
and I almost turn back to hide in my car,
afraid that I might embarrass myself over appetizers or small talk.
But then God answers the door,
and God says, “You’re here!”
And I smile, because I am.*

*And with every step past that threshold,
I know that God is cheering me on.
It’s the pride of a parent watching their child take their first step.
If I freeze, God is not disappointed.
If I fall, God is not mad.
But if I trust the invitation,
if I move closer,
I know, God celebrates.*

*Friends, you’ve got mail.
It’s an invitation to dust off your shoes,
to go deeper,
to trust that you’re worth it,
to lose your keys and your faith,
and then to find them both, along with your worth.
You are invited.
We are invited.*

Again and again and again.

This invitation is for you.

—Rev. Sarah Are

REFLECT: This poem invites us to know that God is with us in our challenges and in each moment. In full honesty, make a list of 5-10 challenges you are struggling with, recognizing that life is messy and life is complicated. Name anything that is hard or heavy in this moment. Write them down in your journal or on the doodle page. Challenge yourself to think of the core emotion underlying each challenge. For example, instead of simply saying, “I’m busy,” perhaps you might confess: “I overcommit myself because I worry that others will think I’m selfish if I say no.” Name your challenges and your confessions, offering them all to God. Take a moment to look over your list. Ask God for forgiveness for the things you can control. Ask God for grace for the things you cannot.

Tips for Young Families:

Have the kids create their own doodle pages, similar to the one that is a part of this liturgy. Help them write their challenges, if needed. If it is difficult for them to think of challenges in their life, invite them to reflect on problems they see in the world that they hope to help change.

READ SCRIPTURE

Genesis 2:7

“7then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. (NRSV)

“7So YHWH fashioned an earth creature out of the clay of the earth, and blew into its nostrils the breath of life. And the earth creature became a living being.” (The Inclusive Bible)

“God formed Man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The Man came alive—a living soul!” (The Message)

“7 Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.” (NLT)

Genesis 3:19b

“you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (NRSV)

“you are dust, and to dust you will return.” (The Inclusive Bible)

“you started out as dirt, you’ll end up dirt.” (The Message)

“For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.” (NLT)

WATCH ONLINE: Check out our St. Thomas United Church YouTube Channel for a short reflection from Rev. Tracy & Rev. Justin. Several other video links will be made available on a special Ash Wednesday congregational email, Feb. 17, 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvt-BXFGvS5ATsSMot2xquQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-qQLqv9f4o>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjgiU5FgsYc>

REFLECT: Having read poetry, named the challenges you are facing, read scripture, and watched the videos, now write down 5-10 hopes you have for this Lenten season. Allow these videos to be encouragement for living life with intention. You can write your hopes in your journal or on your doodle page. As you write, consider these written hopes to be intentions that you are setting for the six weeks ahead. These are not intended to be aimless wishes on stars, but instead, thoughtful intentions for your one wild and precious life.

Tips for Young Families:

Talk about how their challenges or world problems could be overcome and then display them in a visible place for the season of Lent.

THE MARK OF THE CROSS: Often, on Ash Wednesday it is tradition to bear the mark of the cross in ash. It is a reminder of where we have been, where we are destined to return, and that no matter what, God is with us in each moment of our journey. With this in mind you are invited to once again bear the mark of the cross as a reminder of God's presence in your life and at this time.

Apply the temporary tattoos

CLOSING PRAYER & BENEDICTION: Pray the following words. To make this a kinesthetic prayer, circle or underline any phrases that particularly move you or stand out to you.

*God of open doors,
open arms,
and open conversations,
we know
deep in our souls
that you are forever inviting us in.
Again and again,
you invite us to take another step closer,
another step deeper,
another step further,
in this journey of faith.
So with your invitation in our hands,
we pray for strength and wisdom.
Show us the next step in this journey.
We are here.
You are here.
This is holy ground.
May this holy Lenten journey begin
once again.
Gratefully we pray,
Amen.*



Ash Wednesday
— Lent Begins