

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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*Good Enough:
Embracing Faith and Life*

Ash Wednesday

*“Perfectionism is
impossible
Transformation Is Not!”*

***THE CHURCH WITH A HEART, IN THE HEART OF
CHERAW.***

A SERVICE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

MARCH 2, 2022

ASH WEDNESDAY

LITURGICAL COLOR: BURLAP

Chiming of the Hour

Prelude

“I Surrender All”

arr. Suzanne Arant

Welcome and Announcements

Leader: Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lent season, a time when we aspire to make some room for deeper introspection and practices that will draw us into the love and assurance of faith. But sometimes faith can feel not as assured as we hoped for. We can feel “less than,” perceiving that others seem to be able to be “more faithful” in their practices and beliefs. This Lent, rather than change for “the best,” we’ll seek to gain momentum one day at a time, “to reach for a faith that is never perfect, but good enough.”

Opening Prayer

Leader: Let us pray together:

Holy One, Merciful God, make yourself known to us. Be present with us in this often troubled journey of life. Create in us hearts that are open to transformation. Give us the patience of practice in this Lent season—ordering our days with time enough for you. Amen.

Psalter No. 785 Response 1

Confession and Pardon

Pastor: Jesus used the word “hypocrite” to describe those who put on airs in public to make people believe that they were holy, that their religious practice was... well... perfect. But their hearts were actually not in the practice, rather in the rewards that public approval could bring them—which is here today, often gone tomorrow. Sometimes it is life itself that robs us of the shiny, perfect life that we had planned for ourselves. A diagnosis. A broken heart. A lost opportunity. What places in your life and faith could you begin to loosen from the chains of perfectionism? Let us take a moment of silent reflection...

Silent Reflection

Pastor: Hear this compassionate word from the prophet Isaiah: “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?... Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly.”

Know that already, God is offering us freedom from the bonds of perfectionism, inviting us to break the yoke of what “should be” so that we might discover what “might be” when we honor the small steps that are *actually* possible, in this moment, for this one day. And know, that despite our sometimes faltering steps, in the name of Jesus Christ, you are being forgiven, even now.

Congregation: In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

All: Glory to God! Amen.

Instrumental Hymn No. 140

“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

FAITHFULNESS

*Gospel Reading Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

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.

Pastor: The word of God for the people of God.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

Homily Good Enough: Transformation NOT Perfection

Offertory Prayer

Instrumental Hymn No. 405

“Seek Ye First”

SEEK YE

Ritual of Ashes

Leader: We are reminded in the Ritual of Ashes that we are part of the dust and debris of this earth. Just as things of creation grow but also die in the cycle of life, so too our lives have times of growth and times of decay and death. Placing the sign of the cross on our foreheads with ashes is a reminder of this difficult reality but also a reminder of the presence of God, the grace of Christ, and the power of the Spirit in all of it. Early Christians were anointed with the sign of the cross on their foreheads at their baptism. This “sign and seal,” as it is called, is a way to remember that we are marked and held as God’s own, through *all* the transformations and transitions we face.

You have been given a Lenten Kit that has palm ash, oil and a q-tip so you can put an ash cross on your forehead, if you choose. Or you may come and kneel at the altar at the direction of the ushers and I will put an ash cross on your forehead.

A Blessing Before a Fast

Leader: Our Lent series, “Good Enough,” is based on a book of devotions by the same name by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Kate Bowler is a seminary professor whose research about the history of the prosperity gospel and self-help movements in the US laid the groundwork for her latest NY Times bestselling books about dealing with the pressure to “live your best life now” when life throws you curveballs that make constant upward achievement very difficult... like the cancer she has dealt with over the last few years. In the *Good Enough* book of devotions, she and Jessica Richie offer wonderfully graceful invitations to seek alternatives to the pressure of perfectionism. We hope that you will make reading these daily devotions part of your Lent practice.

As Kate and Jessica say in their book, “a fast is giving up something—anything—to make more room for God. It might be a break from social media or Netflix, caffeine, unkind words, alcohol, or holding a grudge. If you are someone who has a complicated relationship with restricting food, skip that for now. Try something else instead. Remember, this isn’t about punishing yourself or a thinly veiled version of a diet. Share your intention with a friend to reinforce your commitment but do your fast in secret—just between you and God. Try it out for a week, and then reassess.”

And so, each worship experience will end with a blessing from the book. Here is “A Blessing Before a Fast.”

Blessed are you, ready to open yourself to a new joy, a doorway that until now has been hidden. In this culture of acquisition and gain, blessed are you desiring fresh ears to hear what might be a bit too loud. Who take the next step to turn it down a notch and make more space for God. Who discipline yourself, with time, intention, and hope, anticipating God to show up in your discomfort. Trusting that when we need God, God promises to be there.

God, give me courage, give me strength, give me hunger for you. Let this set time of less be a chance for more of you. Let this fast be an entrance into the discernment I desire, the divine presence I’m longing for, and the hope to will what You will, oh God, to be who You’ve called me to be.”

Benediction

And now, may the God who loves all of creation, especially the imperfect bits, and Jesus, our companion along this crooked path called life, and the Holy Spirit, who loves to improvise in surprising ways, go with you, dwell among you, and give you joy. Amen.

Postlude

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”

ROCKINGHAM

Worship Notes:

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“A Blessing Before a Fast” from *Good Enough: 40’ish Devotionals for a Life of Imperfection* by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Used with permission. Purchase the book at www.katebowler.com/goodenough.

Liturgist: Mark Armstrong

Acolyte: Nancy Wagnon

Ushers: Norma Cobb & Renie Seel