

“Bonded in Christ’s love, we teach, preach, and equip God’s people for discipleship here and throughout the world.



# Ash Wednesday

February 18, 2026

Rev. Dr. Renae Koehler

*For those who are hearing challenged, Zion has digital listening devices for your use during worship. Please ask a council member for one and they will show you how to use it.*

## The Symbolism of Ashes

Ashes symbolize our mortality and are an ancient sign of sorrow and repentance of sin. On Ash Wednesday, ashes are placed on the foreheads of worshipers in the sign of a cross. Today is the first day of the 40 days of Lent. Wear your ashes tonight as a reminder to yourself and others of the forgiveness of our sins, our mortality and the decision to do the most good with our mortal lives.

## Prelude

## Greeting

## Call to Worship

P - Tonight we begin the season of Lent by wearing the mark of ashes in the shape of a cross on our foreheads.

**C - God is calling me to share love and forgiveness in this gritty, humble, and sacred mark of God.**

P - May the cross of ashes burn forgiveness into our minds and hearts.

**C - I forgive myself and others for past mistakes and poor judgment.**

P - The journey of Lent has begun.

## **Opening Hymn: The Old Rugged Cross (verses 1, 2, and 4)**

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,  
The emblem of suffering and shame;  
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best  
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

*[Refrain]*

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
Till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
And exchange it some day for a crown.

O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,  
Has a wondrous attraction for me;  
For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above  
To bear it to dark Calvary. *[Refrain]*

To the old rugged cross I will ever be true,  
Its shame and reproach gladly bear;  
Then He'll call me some day to my home far away,  
Where His glory forever I'll share. *[Refrain]*

## **Opening Prayer**

P- Eternal and most merciful God,

**C - we are children of dust, ashes, and your spirit. We have not loved you as you have loved us, nor have we lived as we ought, and our years are soon gone. God have mercy on us. Lift us above every past regret and present failure. Reveal to us our true selves; give us grace to accept your mercy and courage to live by your promise. Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world. Grant us your peace. Amen.**

## Reading of the Scriptures

### **First Reading - Genesis 18:20-27 We are but dust and ashes**

Then the Lord said, "How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me, and if not, I will know." So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Then Abraham came near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake." Abraham answered, "Let me take it upon myself to speak to my lord, I who am but dust and ashes.

### **Psalm 51:10–12 (Please read responsively.)**

Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
**and put a new and right spirit within me.**  
Do not cast me away from your presence,  
**and do not take your holy spirit from me.**  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
**and sustain in me a willing spirit.**

### **Second Reading - Acts 20:33–35 More blessed to give than receive**

I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of

the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' *Here ends this reading.*

**Gospel - Matthew 6:19–21    Store up treasure in heaven**

(Please stand as you are able)

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.

Gospel Sung Response - (tune: Be Still My Soul)

**Be still my soul the Lord is on thy side  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain  
Leave to thy God to order and provide  
In every change He faithful will remain  
Be still my soul thy best, thy heavenly friend  
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end**

**Sermon - Rev. Dr. Renae Koehler**

Offering Hymn - Near My God to Thee (verses 1, 3 and 5)

**Nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee! E'en though it be a  
cross, that raiseth me, still all my song shall be, nearer, my  
God to Thee; nearer, my God to Thee, nearer to Thee!**

**There let the way appear, steps unto heaven; all that Thou  
sendest me, in mercy given; Angels to beckon me nearer, my  
God, to Thee, Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!**

**Or if, on joyful wing cleaving the sky, sun, moon, and stars  
forgot, upward I fly, Still all my song shall be, nearer, my God,  
to Thee, Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!**

Offering Sung Response Doxology

**C – Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise Him above ye heav'nly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen**

**Offering Blessing**

P -All that we bring;

**C - our treasures, our hands, and our hearts; are already transformed by your generosity, O God. These gifts carry healing, wholeness, and love. Bless our offering, to inspire abundance, plant peace, open doors for joy and sacred connection. Amen.**

Hymn #626 vs 1 & 5 Abide with Me

**Abide with me, fast falls the eventide. The dark-ness deepens; Lord with me abide. When other helpers fail and comforts flee, help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.**

**Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes, shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies; heav'ns morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee; in life, in death, O Lord, a-bide with me.**

**Prayer of the Ashes**

P - Forgiving God,

**C - empty me of my selfishness and pour in your spirit of love. Create within me the unquenchable desire to forgive as I have been forgiven by you. Lead me to the depths of my heart where I can ponder the nature of your holy love and the unbelievable happiness of freedom from sin. As I come forward to receive the blessing of ashes, remind me of my mortality and empower me to make the most of my life. Help me always to choose a posture of prayer, reconciliation, and**

**kindness in my relationship with others and my joyful response to you. Amen.**

## **Blessing of the Ashes**

**Receiving the Ashes -**

***Please come forward for The Imposition of Ashes.***

**Closing Hymn - God Who Made the Earth and Heavens**

**ELW #564 vs 1-3**

## **Benediction**

## **Postlude**

## **Lenten Works and Practices**

The classic works of Lent include: Giving up something that no longer serves you, focusing on your spiritual renewal, acts of charity, and attendance in worship. The purpose of any Lenten work is to assist your ascent toward Easter, the first step of which requires a change of heart.

In what ways do you need to be healed, transformed, freed from addictions, obsessions, or destructiveness. Base your Lenten promise on what you need spiritually. Include here what you want to give up for Lent, something you want to try to do that you have been neglecting, or a plan to improve your spiritual life.

**My Lenten plan** *You may wish to pencil in your choices of Lenten practices that you hope will aid that inner transformation:*