

Week One February 25 (Ash Wednesday)

REFLECTION: What deeper reflection are we called to in this time? Why?

Texts: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 **or** Is 58:1-12; Ps 51:1-17; 2 Cor
5:20b – 6:10; Mt 6:1-6,16-21

Introduction – Beginning the Lenten journey anew (may be read aloud or printed in bulletin or displayed on a screen)

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right
spirit within me.*

(Psalm 51:10)

Each year, we are invited to engage in a spiritual journey during Lent: reflection on our lives, on our place in God's world, and on Christ's awesome gift of love and life to us, as believers.

We are called to a time of deeper reflection on Christ's presence in our lives and in our world *today*, even as we recall Christ's journey to the Cross so many years ago.

During Lent, we re-focus our minds, hearts, and spirits more intentionally to "return to the Lord;" and we are forgiven, redeemed, and sanctified. With a "new and right spirit" we are also called and sent forth, empowered and equipped through God's grace, to participate with joy and hope in the renewal of God's world. Indeed, it is about "God's Work, Our Hands."

Never has that need for the renewal and restoration of God's world been more urgent, than in this first decade of the 21st century. The groans of creation, the cries of humankind, the warnings of scientists, the voices of today's "eco-prophets" – all call to us and urge us to respond in faith that is active in love and hope, with actions of justice and compassion. Such is the fruit that can be born of our deep, and earnest, reflection this Lenten season.

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all things hold together;
The love of God our Creator; and

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The enlivening breath and communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all!

(Response) **And also with you.**

Hymn suggestions

Gather Us In [ELW 532; WOV 718]

Rise Up, O Saints of God! [ELW 669; LBW 383]

Change My Heart, O God [ELW 801]

Touch the Earth Lightly [ELW 739]

Text Notes

Is 58:1-12

“Is not this the fast that I choose ...” (vs. 6-8a). Note aspects of social justice; consider how creation itself is also unjustly “oppressed” in our day and the ways in which ecological problems oppress those human populations most in need. How shall we “fast” today to avoid empty ritual?

“... You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in” (v 12b).

A rich image here, and are we not also called by God today to “repair the breaches” in our communities and world? - to reconnect, to restore, and to build up healing, compassionate, justice and peace-filled relationships, that promote the well-being of all creation and healthy, sustainable communities?

[Or] Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

The text here calls us even more urgently to “return to the Lord” with all our heart, to open, to “rend our hearts,” and to call a “solemn assembly [and] gather the people.”

We are called to a deeper, remorseful, and communal reflection and repentance.

“Blow the trumpet ... sound the alarm on my holy mountain” (v 1a).

What are the alarms that need to be sounded today in ecological and eco-justice terms?

Ps 51:1-17

“Teach me wisdom in my secret heart” (v 6b) – Again, the call to reflection, to being open to God’s spirit and direction, for how we should be, and live, in this world as God’s people.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (v 10).

This is the fruit of our seeking, our reflection, and our coming to God with broken and contrite hearts and spirits, asking mercy and forgiveness. With a “new and right spirit”

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within us, we can see – and respond to – God’s call to care for creation, by fostering just and compassionate relationships, among human communities and with all of creation.

2 Cor 5:20b – 6:10

What might it mean for us to not “accept the grace of God in vain” (6:1)? How does our being “reconciled to God” shape us for service in Christ’s name (5:20b)? In 6:4-10, note the comparative characteristics of the servants of God and a testimony to true riches in Christ being “as having nothing and yet possessing everything” (10b). These verses perhaps offer an avenue to talk about how God’s grace shapes us and calls us to live in our challenging world today. What is truly important? What has the greatest value?

Mt 6:1-6, 16-21

These verses describe the manner in which we should pray and fast (i.e., not for the attention of others; and of course, the “in-between” verses hold the Lord’s Prayer). They carry a commendation of private prayer and reflection. Lent is a perfect time to engage in deeper, personal reflection, and to pray more earnestly that God’s “kingdom come and will be done, on Earth!” These verses also direct our attention to what we truly “treasure” and teach that our hearts are most closely connected that which we most treasure. It begs the questions: How do we treasure our relationships – to God, to one another, to the rest of creation? Do we accord higher value to “stuff”?

ACTION IDEAS

Let this be a time not only for more earnest reflection, but also a time to learn more, and to learn from one another: Consider having a special area or bulletin board to post (1) articles or photos regarding current, pressing environmental issues and (2) also invite parishioners to post small notes to share what creation-care steps they may already be taking at home.

Has your church placed its order for sustainably grown Eco Palms? www.lwr.org/palms

If not this year, plan now to do so next year.