

**First Congregational
United Church of Christ
River Falls, WI**

**February 14, 2024
6:30 pm**



Lent 2024: Why?

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent, a time of preparing for the resurrection of Jesus on Easter. Traditionally, Lent is a time to pray, give alms and fast. Tonight's worship service includes the imposition of ashes and communion. Join us each Wednesday at 6:30 pm for Prayer Around the Cross, a half hour service of prayer and song, this year centered on some of the simple yet big questions we ask God today.

*No matter who you are. No matter where you are on your
spiritual journey, you are welcome here!*

WELCOME AND GREETING

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Earth to earth,

P: **Ashes to ashes,**

L: From dust we were created,

P: **And to dust we shall return.**

L: From the dust and ashes of our lives,

P: **Create again, O Lord.**

L: Create in us clean hearts, O God,

P: **And renew your free spirit within us.**

*OPENING HYMN

Again We Keep this Solemn Fast

#187

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

L: Sisters and brothers in Christ: Every year at Easter we celebrate with joy our redemption and renewal through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

P: **The season of Lent is a time to prepare for this celebration and to make room in our lives for the Spirit of God to renew us in this mystery.**

L: We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance and our need for the love and forgiveness shown to us in Jesus Christ.

P: **In the name of Christ, and by the Spirit's power at work in our lives, let us observe a Holy Lent, by self-examination and penitence, by prayer and fasting, by practicing works of love, and by reading and reflecting on God's Holy Word.**

L: Let us begin our Lenten journey by together confessing our sins and seeking the forgiveness and new life that is promised to us in Christ Jesus.

L: We are dust, and to dust we shall return.

P: **Have mercy on us, O God –**

L: According to your steadfast love and mercy –

P: **Blot out our transgressions.**

L: We are dust –

P: **Finite and fixed, human and incomplete, fixed to this earthly home.**

L: Breathe life into our lungs of clay; let us sing your heavenly praise.

P: **We are wounded –**

L: Broken and battered, spoiled and veiled by the shadows of sin.

P: **Wash our wounds, cleanse our hearts, bind up our brokenness.**

L: You have the power to do it, and the love to desire it.

P: **We cry for help –**

L: Desperate and distressed, aimless, anxious in our own limitations.

P: **Make us radiant with your love, confident in your goodness.**

L: Let us be hands and feet for a lonely world.

P: **Let us be voice and song for a silent world.**

L: Let us be heart and gift for a needy world.

P: **All through Christ...**

L: Only through Christ...

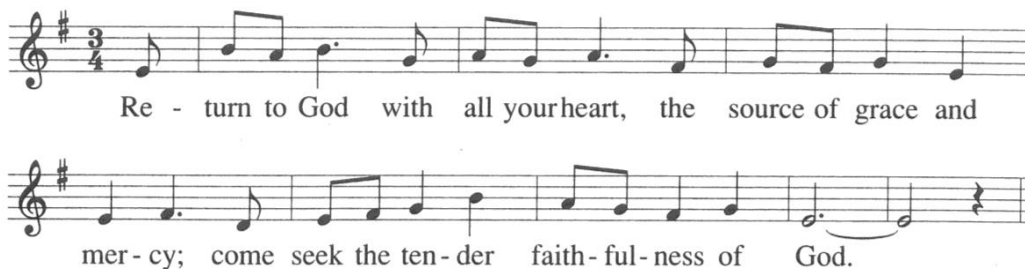
All: **Ever through Christ. Amen.**

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Isaiah 58:1-12

RESPONSE

Return to God



Re - turn to God with all your heart, the source of grace and
mer - cy; come seek the ten - der faith - ful - ness of God.

GOSPEL LESSON

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-23

HOMILY

Rev. Stacy Johnson Myers

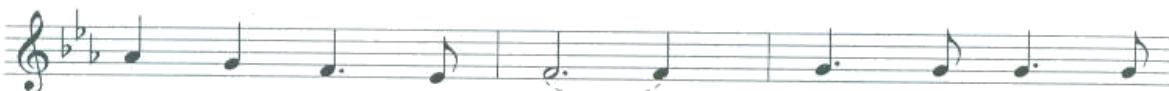


***SERMON HYMN**

Ashes



1. We rise a - gain from ash - es, from the
2. We of - fer you our fail - ures, we
3. Then rise a - gain from ash - es, let
4. † Thanks be to the Fa - ther, who



good we've failed to do. We rise a - gain from
of - fer you at - tempts, The gifts not ful - ly
heal - ing come to pain, Though spring has turned to
made us like him - self. Thanks be to the



ash - es, to cre - ate our - selves a - new. If
giv - en, the dreams not ful - ly dreamt. Give our
win - ter, and sun - shine turned to rain. The
Son, who saved us by his death.



all our world is ash - es, then
stum - bl - ings di - rec - tion, give our
rain we'll use for grow - ing, and cre -
Thanks be to the Spir - it, who cre -



must our lives be true, An of - fer - ing of
vi - sions wid - er view, An of - fer - ing of
ate the world a - new From an of - fer - ing of
ates the world a - new From an of - fer - ing of



ash - es, an of - fer - ing to you.
ash - es, an of - fer - ing to you.
ash - es, an of - fer - ing to you.
ash - es, an of - fer - ing to you.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

(Please be seated until it is your turn to come forward to receive ashes.
You may receive ashes on your forehead or on your hand.)

SONG

The God of Second Chances



1. Come now, O God of sec - ond
 2. Come now, O God, re - lease our
 3. Come now, O God, and still our
 4. Come now, O God, shake our re -
 5. Come now, O God, and grant com -
 6. Come now, O God of sec - ond



chanc - es; o - pen our lives to heal.
 de - mons; o - pen our eyes to see
 an - ger; o - pen our minds to peace.
 sent - ment; o - pen our way to choose
 pas - sion; o - pen our hearts to love.
 chanc - es; may we for - give our - selves,



Re - move our hate, and melt our rage.
 the shame with - in, our guilt and pain.
 Em - brace our fear, and hold us close.
 the way of love o - ver re - venge.
 May we let go of all our hurt.
 may we be - come your liv - ing sign:



Save us from our - selves.
 Mend us; make us whole.
 Calm the storm with - in,
 Show us a new way.
 Help us to move on.
 Chil - dren of God's love.

SONG

Return to God

Congregation join on refrain



Re - turn to God with all your heart, the source of grace and



mer - cy; come seek the ten - der faith - ful - ness of God.

SONG

Where Your Treasure Is
Congregation join on refrain

Where your treas - ure is, there your
heart shall be. All that you pos - sess will nev - er set you
free. Seek the things that last; come and
learn from me. Where your
treas - ure is, your heart shall be.

The musical score is written on five staves in G minor (three flats) and 4/4 time. The melody is simple and suitable for congregational singing. The lyrics are printed below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across notes. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

SONG

In the Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful

***In the Lord I'll be ever thankful,
in the Lord I will rejoice!***

***Look to God, do not be afraid;
Lift up your voices, the Lord is near;
Lift up your voices, the Lord is near.***

PRAYERS AND LORD'S PRAYER

...Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

FROM ASHES AND PRAYER TO THE TABLE

L: Our failure to embrace God's way separates us from God and from each other.

P: Yet, God longs to wrap us in an embrace of forgiveness and love and beckons us toward abundant life.

L: Knowing that our days move toward their end, let us in confidence and gratitude reach out for the life God offers to us.

P: Let us join with our sisters and brothers and come to Christ's table to take into ourselves Jesus' body and blood, our source of strength and tenderness.

THE COMMUNION

All Christians are welcome at the table of our Lord. The bread is gluten-free. Red wine and white grape juice are offered. Those choosing not to commune may receive a blessing from the servers.

The Invitation to the Supper

L: Hear the words of our Savior Jesus Christ:

Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden for I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart,
And you will find rest for your souls.

I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never go hungry,
And whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness
For they will be filled.

The Great Thanksgiving

L: The Lord be with you.

P: And also with you.

L: Lift up your hearts.

P: We lift them up to the Lord.

L: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

P: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

L: We give you thanks...

The Words of Institution

L: We rejoice in this holy meal as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

All: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Distribution of the Elements

Bread for the Journey



1,5 Give us bread for the jour - ney give us bread. Give us
2 Guide our way as we trav - el guide our way. Guide our
3 Make us one with each oth - er make us one. Make us
4 Lead us home to the gar - den, lead us home. Lead us



bread for the jour - ney give us bread. When our legs are get - ting
way as we trav - el guide our way. With so ma - ny roads be -
one with each oth - er make us one. All the walls we've built a -
home to the gar - den, lead us home; where we'll live with all cre -



12 heav - y, and we're hang - ing down our heads, give us bread for the
fore us where to go is hard to say. Guide our way as we
round us: may we learn to tear them down. Make us one with each
a - tion find our place and nev - er roam. Lead us home to the



16 jour - ney, give us bread.
trav - el guide our way.
oth - er, make us one.
gar - den, lead us home.

***COMMISSIONING**

Go forth bearing the sign of Jesus' cross on your body. Carry the power and hope of Jesus' cross in your heart and imagination. Match your days to the gracious and merciful life God calls you to lead. **Amen.**

POSTLUDE

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Please join us each Wednesday in Lent for food and worship. Worship will be in the Fellowship Hall with the Prayer Around the Cross Service.

Our Wednesday schedule will be:

Wednesday Schedule

- 3:45 – 5:15 pm Wednesday School
- 5:15 – 6:00 pm Family Meals (sign up!)
- 5:45 – 6:30 pm Bell Practice
- 6:30 – 7:00 pm Lenten Worship: Prayer Around the Cross
- 7:00 – 7:30 pm Confirmation/Interns/Youth Group
- 7:00 – 8:15 pm Choir Practice

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Isaiah 58:1-12

Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgements, they delight to draw near to God. 'Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?' Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

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? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rearguard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-23

'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.

'The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!