

Ash Wednesday Worship Service



Call to Worship

Cindy Palm, Lay Servant

Get ready; get ready to return to God. Place your trust in God and God alone! Return to the Lord!

It is not always easy to return to God; we have had our way for so long.

Blow the trumpet. Sound the alarm. Call the young and the old; tell everyone that the Lord is coming.

It is not easy to talk about the Lord to people who have heard our preaching so many times.

Call for a fast.

Fasting is not easy; we hunger for so many things.

Nobody said it would be easy. But we must return to the Lord. The Coming of the Lord is near.

We commit to turn from our old ways. We will turn our lives over to the One who makes a way.

Nobody said it would be easy.

Nobody said it would be easy, but we must return to the Lord!

Opening Hymn

“Sweet Hour of Prayer”

United Methodist Hymnal #496

Matthew Weber

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Prayer

Rev. Dr. Felicia LaBoy

God, we have to admit that we don't like Ash Wednesday. We would rather skip the penitence and soul-searching of Lent and skip right to the joy of Easter morning. The world teaches us that mistakes are awful and should be covered up at all cost. We learn to blame others instead of owning up to what we do and the pain we inflict.

Lord, give us the strength in this time of Lent to ask for forgiveness for the hurt we cause and the mistakes we make. Remind us that the difficulties of life form and shape us. Teach us how to turn back to you, to love our neighbor, and to reach out to those who suffer. We ask that you use these forty days of Lent to prepare us for our mission to the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Gospel Reading

Cindy Palm, Lay Servant

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 (MSG)

¹“Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who may you won't be applauding.”

²⁻⁴“When you do something for someone else, don't call attention to yourself. You've seen them in action, I'm sure—'playactors' I call them—treating prayer meeting and street corner alike as a stage, acting compassionate as long as someone is watching, playing to the crowds. They get applause, true, but that's all they get. When you help someone out, don't think about how it looks. Just do it—quietly and unobtrusively. That is the way your God, who conceived you in love, working behind the scenes, helps you out.

⁵“And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayer, hoping for fifteen minutes of fame! Do you think God sits in a box seat?”

⁶“Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

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Gospel Reading continued

Cindy Palm, Lay Servant

¹⁶⁻¹⁸”When you practice some appetite-denying discipline to better concentrate on God, don’t make a production out of it. It might turn you into a small-time celebrity but it won’t make you a saint. If you ‘go into training’ inwardly, act normal outwardly. Shampoo and comb your hair, brush your teeth, wash your face. God doesn’t require attention-getting devices. He won’t overlook what you are doing; he’ll reward you well.

¹⁹⁻²¹”Don’t hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!- stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it’s safe from moths and rust and burglars. It’s obvious, isn’t it? The place where you treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, where you will end up being.

Anthem

““Reign”

S. Aldredge

First UMC Elgin Cathedral Choir

(Recorded February 2019)

Prayer of Repentance

Cindy Palm, Lay Servant

*O God, you delight not in pomp and show,
but in a humble and contrite heart.
Overturn our love of worldly possessions
and fix our hearts more firmly on you,
that, having nothing,
we may yet possess everything,
a treasure stored up for us in heaven. Amen.*

Assurance of Forgiveness

Rev. Dr. Felicia LaBoy

The promise of God is clear, when we return to the Lord, God is gracious and merciful and does not turn a deaf ear to those who turn their hearts to God. When we return to the Lord with repentant hearts, God forgives us and blesses us with a renewed and deepened relationship with Christ Jesus. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

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Old Testament Reading

Rev. Dr. Felicia LaBoy

Isaiah 58:1-12 (MSG)

¹⁻³Shout! A full-throated shout!

Hold nothing back—a trumpet-blast shout!

Tell my people what's wrong with their lives,
face my family Jacob with their sins!

They're busy, busy, busy as worship,
and love studying all about me.

To all appearances they're a nation of right-living people—
law-abiding, God-honoring.

They ask me, 'What's the right thing to do?'
and love having me on their side.

But they also complain,

'Why do we fast and you don't look our way?

Why do we humble ourselves and you don't even notice?'

³⁻⁵Well, here's why:

"The bottom line on your 'fast days' is profit.

You drive your employees much too hard.

You fast, but at the same time you bicker and fight.

You fast, but you swing a mean fist.

The kind of fasting you do

won't get your prayers off the ground.

Do you think this is the kind of fast day I'm after;
a day to show off humility?

To put on a pious long face

and parade around solemnly in blask?

Do you call *that* fasting,

a fast day that I, God, would like?

⁶⁻⁹This is the kind of fast day I'm after:

to break the chains of injustice,

get rid of exploitation in the workplace,

free the oppressed,

cancel debts.

What I'm interested in seeing you do it:

sharing your food with the hungry,

inviting the homeless poor into your homes,

putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,

being available to your own families.

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Old Testament Reading continued

Isaiah 58:1-12 (MSG)

⁶⁻⁹Do this and the lights will turn on,
and your lives will turn around at once.
Your righteousness will pave your way.
The God of glory will secure your passage.
Then when you pray, God will answer.
You'll call out for help and I'll say, 'Here I am.'
⁹⁻¹²"If you get rid of unfair practices,
quit blaming victims,
quit gossiping about other people's sins,
If you are generous with the hungry
and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,
Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness,
your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.
I will always show you where to go.
I'll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—
firm muscles, strong bones.
You'll be like a well-watered garden,
a gurgling spring that never runs dry.
You'll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew,
rebuild the foundations from out of your past.
You'll be know as those who can fix anything,
restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate,
make the community livable again.

Message

Rev. Dr. Felicia LaBoy

"The Fast We Choose"

Prayer

Cindy Palm, Lay Servant

"Return to me with all your heart,": says the Lord, "with fasting, weeping and sorrow." God is merciful and compassionate, ready to forgive. In the forty days ahead, may you search yourself and find truth, may you seek wholeness and find it. Let the journey start with humble ashes, marking your body and your spirit to signify your commitment to be cleansed by your loving God. Amen.

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Observance of Lenten Discipline

Rev. Dr. Felicia LaBoy

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The early Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the church that before the Easter celebration there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation.

During this season converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins and separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to participation in the life of the church.

In this way the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the church, to observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word.

To make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature, let us now kneel and bow before our Creator and Redeemer.

Thanksgiving Over the Ashes

Rev. Dr. Felicia LaBoy

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. Grant that these ashes, whether ashes of ourselves or those ashes we have gathered, that these ashes may be to us a sign of our mortality and penitence, so that we may remember that only by your gracious gift are we given everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior Amen.

Imposition of Ashes

Rev. Dr. Felicia LaBoy

Amen. Repent and believe the gospel. Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Closing Prayer

Rev. Dr. Felicia LaBoy

Closing Song

"Dust and Ashes"

Decesare

Matthew Weber