



*Living by Faith, Known by Love, A Voice of Hope*



First Church in Windsor, UCC

**Ash Wednesday**

February 22, 2023, at 6 p.m.

**Prelude**

**Welcome**

**\*Time of Centering**

One: Holy God, there are days when it is harder to pray than others; days when the disappointments of yesterday still linger in the memory as the weight of the day ahead feels too heavy to bear.

**Two: And yet, these are the days we need prayer the most.**

One: There are seasons in a relationship where it is harder to love than others; seasons where the unbridled joy and endless hope have been harnessed by the realities of careers, parenting, debt, aging, disappointments, and growing apart.

**Two: And yet, these are the seasons we need to love one another the most.**

One: There are times in our lives of faith when it is harder to remain faith-filled than others; times when the dark night of the soul remains through sunrises too numerous to count, and the hope of relief seems afar off.

**Two: And yet, these are the times when we need our faith the most.**

One: Speak to us anew in days, seasons, and times that are parched and passionless, and refresh the dry places in our lives. Speak to us in the deep, secret places where others cannot enter and your voice reverberates our entire being.

**Two: Speak to us anew, Holy God. Amen.**

**\*Hymn**

*Nearer My God to You*  
Words by Sarah Flower Adams  
Music by Lowell Mason  
Public domain

**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.**

**When like the wanderer, the sun gone down,  
darkness be over me, my rest a stone;  
then in my dreams I'd be nearer, my God, to thee;  
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee.**

**There let the way appear, steps up to 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.**

## **Prayer of Invocation**

**Amazing God, you visited your son Jesus upon us, so draw us together in worship. Look upon us, for we are paralyzed in so many ways and in need of healing. May your Word minister to us in such a way that we can stand up for what is right and good. Help us to walk courageously where you would have us go, offering healing to a hurting world. Amen.**

## **Prayer of our Savior**

**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 sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever. Amen**

## **Statement of Purpose**

Friends in Christ, we begin today a forty-day journey toward Easter. We enter the Lenten season to prepare ourselves to welcome the risen Christ with lives renewed by the breath of the Spirit. We assume a discipline of self-examination, confession, and penitence. We dedicate ourselves to meditate upon the scriptures and to converse with God in prayer. We seek to be more faithful disciples of Christ whose lives are shaped by the one whom we confess to be Lord and Savior of the world. On this Ash Wednesday, let us remember that we are dust, and to dust we shall return.

## **Scripture**

### **Isaiah 58:1-12**

Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet.  
Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.  
For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways,  
as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God.  
They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.  
'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it?  
Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'  
Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.  
Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists.  
You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.  
Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is  
it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is  
that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?  
Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—  
when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?  
Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.  
Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.  
If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you  
spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light  
will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.  
The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land  
and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose

waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

### **Matthew 6:25-34**

<sup>25</sup>“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup>Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup>And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>28</sup>And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup>yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>30</sup>But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup>Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ <sup>32</sup>For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup>But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup>“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

### **Homily**

Pastor Nicole

“Worry Never Accomplishes Anything”

### **Responsive Reading and Confession of Sin (From Psalm 51)**

#### **Refrain**

#### *Sanctuary*

Words and music by John W. Thompson and Randy Scruggs  
C 1982 Whole Armor Publishing Company  
Used by permission. CCLI License #11115938

**Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary,  
pure and holy, tried and true.  
With thanksgiving, I’ll be a living  
sanctuary for you.**

One: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

**All: Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.**

One: For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

**All: Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.**

One: Indeed, when I was born, I became a sinner

**All: You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.**

One: Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be as clean as fresh snow

**All: Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that have been crushed rejoice.**

One: Hide your face from my sins and blot out all by iniquities

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

One: Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me

**All: Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach others your ways, and sinners will return to you.**

One: Deliver me from bloodshed, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

**All: O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.**

One: For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

**All: The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.**

One: Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

**All:** then you will delight in right sacrifices.

### **Refrain**

*Lord Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary*

**Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary,  
pure and holy, tried and true.  
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living  
sanctuary for you.**

### **Assurance of Forgiveness**

#### **Prayer over the Ashes**

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth.  
May these ashes be to us a sign of our mortality and failures,  
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 and Holy Vessels**

**Pastor** I invite you to come now to receive the mark of ashes on your forehead, a sign that from dust you came and to dust you will return. You were given a piece of paper shaped like a Holy Vessel. During Lent we will be exploring how we might find wholeness in our lives, in our families, and in our world. Please write down on the paper how in the brokenness, what makes you whole? Our willingness to come forward, and wear the mark of repentance, shows how we are seeking wholeness. You are invited to bring your Holy Vessel forward.

#### **Closing Prayer**

*Ashes*

by Rev. LaTrelle Miller Easterling

Just and Loving God,  
As the ashes are spread down my forehead  
I am reminded of the gift of grace you endured  
for our new beginning.  
You were deserted, but you did not desert us.  
You were despised, but you did not despise humanity.  
You were ridiculed, but you did not ridicule the guilty.  
You withstood the darkness to offer us light.  
I receive the ashes.  
I draw closer to you.  
I receive the ashes.

As the ashes are spread across my forehead  
I am reminded of your love for all people.

Your love is from everlasting to everlasting.  
Your love knows no worthy or unworthy.

Your love cannot be bought through wealth  
nor acquired through fame.  
Your love is complete.  
I receive the ashes.  
I draw closer to humankind.  
I receive the ashes.

As I wear these ashes on my forehead  
may they make a lasting impression upon my heart  
to be more emptied of self, and more centered in you.  
I receive the ashes.  
I walk the path toward your waters of renewal.  
I receive the ashes. Amen.

**\*Hymn**

*Lord, I Want to Be a Christian*  
African-American spiritual  
Public domain

**Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart, in my heart;  
Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart.  
In my heart, in my heart,  
Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart.**

**Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart, in my heart;  
Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart.  
In my heart, in my heart,  
Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart.**

**Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart, in my heart;  
Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart.  
In my heart, in my heart,  
Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart.**

**\*Benediction**

**Postlude**

*Deep River*  
African American spiritual  
Public domain  
\*\*\*

Prayers of this service are used with permission. © Marcia McFee, [www.worshipdesignstudio.com](http://www.worshipdesignstudio.com).  
Prayer/Poem © Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling. Used with permission for "Roll Down Justice" Lent series by the  
Worship Design Studio