



St. Stephen's Lutheran Church
Worship Service with Holy Communion
Wednesday, February 17, 2021 ■ 11:00 a.m. & 7:00 p.m.

St. Stephen's Lutheran Church

Ash Wednesday

Worship Service with Holy Communion

Welcome to the Lenten journey to the cross ...

For this season of Lent at St Stephen's we are using the eight biblical Stations of the Cross as a framework for our worship, including Scripture readings, meditations, music and prayers. Beginning on Ash Wednesday and concluding on Good Friday, we will follow Jesus along the *Via Dolorosa*, the Way of Sorrow, as he journeys from Pilate's Hall to his death on the cross, meditating on one station each service.

We enter this journey with the penitent's prayer, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*" (Psalm 139:23-24)

We pray that you find peace and be blest by these reflections on God's grace and gift of love. Amen.



WE PREPARE TO WORSHIP

Prelude

Ash Wednesday Reflection

Ben D.

Welcome

*Good evening and welcome to Lent at St Stephen's Lutheran Church in West St Paul, MN. Our 2021 Journey to the Cross focus' our meditation on eight Biblical Stations of the Cross. We are reflecting on one station at each of our midweek Lenten meditations, including today through Holy Week. This evening we are focusing on **Station 1: Pilate Condemns Jesus to Die.** The remaining stations will be meditated on in the subsequent weeks leading up to Good Friday, Jesus Dies on the Cross.*

Singing Bowl

Silence is kept for reflection.

Blessing

*All may make the sign of the cross,
the sign marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God the father,
and the Communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.

And also with you.

Prayer

Thank you Lord for this season of Lent.
May it afford us a new and faithful perspective
In the midst of the challenges, fears, and joys of our lives.

Guide us in our practice of Lent.
May the changes we begin, our new expressions of faith,
become sources of growth for love of you
and love of our neighbor.

Jesus, during this Lent as we bring our attention to the stations of your cross,
as we open ourselves to your example of love for all,
may we find new ways to offer ourselves—
to make room for others -
to follow your life-giving journey of the cross.

As we join together as your people,
confident in your love,
may we freely and trustingly follow where you lead.
Amen.

Confession

**Create in me a clean heart, O God.
And renew a right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence.
Do not take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and grant a willing spirit to sustain me.**

(invitation to kneel)

God of Compassion,
We turn toward you now.
Forgive our pride and forgive our insecurities.
Forgive our self-absorption and forgive our self-destruction.
Forgive our longing for attention and forgive our desire to hide.
Forgive each step we take away from you.

Imposition of Ashes

Our ancestors in the faith used ashes as a sign of our repentance,
a symbol of the uncertainty and fragility of human life.
Like them, we have tasted the ashes of hopelessness;
the ashes of loss and pain;
the ashes of brokenness.

(acknowledgement of ashes)

Gracious God,
**out of your love and mercy
you breathed into dust the breath of life,
creating us to serve you and our neighbors.
Call forth our prayers and acts of kindness,
and strengthen us to face our mortality with confidence
in the mercy of your Son, Jesus Christ,
our Savior and Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.**

Hymn

“Beneath the Cross of Jesus”

ELW #338 vs. 1, 2

**Beneath the cross of Jesus
I long to take my stand;
the shadow of a mighty rock
within a weary land,
a home within a wilderness,
a rest upon the way,
from the burning of the noontide heat
and burdens of the day.**

Upon the cross of Jesus,
my eye at times can see
the very dying form of one
who suffered there for me.
And from my contrite heart, with tears,
two wonders I confess:
the wonder of his glorious love
and my unworthiness.

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WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 118:19-29

Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

This is the LORD's gate; the righteous shall enter through it.

I will give thanks because you have answered me.
You have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This has come from the LORD.

It is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day on which the Lord has acted.

Let us shout with joy and rejoice in it.

Please, save us, O LORD! Please!

O LORD, please bring success!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.

We bless you from the house of the LORD.

The LORD is God

He has given us light.

With cords bind the festival sacrifice to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you.

You are my God, I will extol you.

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.

For his steadfast love endures forever.

Prayer

O Lord, we are gathered together here this day as your people,
as those who have been called out of darkness into your marvelous light.

We are here only because you have loved us and been faithful
across the generations that we might be your people.

And yet we quickly confess that we are not worthy of that love.

As we contemplate the Cross and what it means,
we are filled with joy and wonder at the sacrifice that Jesus
has made to show us light in the darkness
and offer us life in the midst of death.

We confess that we have nothing to offer in return for that sacrifice,
nothing that will match such love.

We know that only love can respond to such a gift.

Yet we know that we are not always loving or lovable.

But you remain steadfastly faithful to us.

You love us even when we are not lovable,
and remain steadfast in your grace that calls us
to follow the example of Jesus who is the Christ.

We are committed to that journey,
to be followers of the One who has given so much
that we might be sons and daughters of God.
But sometimes the journey that we take in following Jesus
who is the Christ is not all light and joy.
Sometimes the Way is rough and dimly lit.
Sometimes the darkness of life threatens to engulf the light.

And so we cry out to you, O Lord.
Forgive us for our sometimes faltering steps.
Show us more clearly the Way.
Shine anew the light of your presence into our lives
so strongly that a new love for You will be kindled.
Light within us a love beyond emotion and sentimentality,
a love that is willing to lay aside all privilege and self-centeredness.
Grow within us a love that is willing to surrender
all our fears and uncertainties to you,
that desires nothing more than to love God
with all our being and to love those around us
with the same faithfulness with which you love us.

Now, as we begin this journey of the Cross,
we open our hearts and minds to you.
We lay aside for these moments the trivialities of our life
and bring ourselves into your presence.
Speak to us what we need to hear.
And help us to hear, not just the words that are spoken,
but your Word spoken afresh in our hearts.

Speak, for your servants are listening.

[A short time of silent prayer and meditation]

Let us begin our journey.

Stations of the Cross

Station 1: Pilate Condemns Jesus to Die

Leader:

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him,
"Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so."
But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer.
Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?"
But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge,
so that the governor was greatly amazed. . . .
So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing,
but rather that a riot was beginning,
he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd,
saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." . . .
and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. (Matt 27:11-14, 24, 26b)

Speaker:

Jesus, I wish you would speak!
I wish you would proclaim who you are.
I wish you would confront the disbelief of the crowds
and the arrogant cowardice of the powers that be.
Surely someone will speak up for you!
Where are the lepers who were healed?
Where are the blind who can now see?
Where are all the people who ate the bread and fish on the hillside?
Where are those who followed you so easily
when they thought you would become King of the Jews?
Yet no one speaks.

No voice in the crowd comes to your defense.
You stand alone.

You stand before Pilate, the power of Rome.
Weakness stands before strength.
And yet, Pilate, the ruthless enforcer for the Empire
is not really in control here.
He cannot make you confess.
He cannot quiet the crowds.
For all his power, he cannot find the courage to do what is right.
So he does what is safe.
He yields to the crowds for the sake of order.
Courage and strength do not always sit on thrones
or judgment seats.
Power is not always in the hands of Empires.

I have been alone.
I have been falsely accused,
and no one has spoken for me.
I have been treated unfairly by those
who could have used their power for better purposes.
I can understand some of your feelings
as you stand silently before Pilate
and watch him proclaim his own innocence
as he condemns an innocent man.

But perhaps I have treated others unfairly as well.
Perhaps I have not spoken up for others when they needed a voice.
There are those around me who have been treated unjustly.
Have I always had the courage to come to their defense?
There are those around me who feel alone and abandoned.
Have I always been there for them?
O Lord, forgive me for not always being who I should be.

I find it easy to condemn the moral cowardice of Pilate.
Have I ever given in to pressure from others
to take the easy path rather than the right path?
Have I ever chosen the easy path over the right path?

Leader:

Jesus, I see in your silence the quiet strength
that reveals a peace and a resolve.
O Lord, help me deal with the unfairness of life
without becoming critical of others.
Help me to be sensitive to the pain and feelings of others.
Give me the courage to do what is right
without being swayed by the demands of others.

O Lord, hear our prayers. Amen.

Hymn

“Go to Dark Gethsemane”

ELW #347 vs. 1, 2

**Go to dark Gethsemane,
all who feel the tempter's pow'r;
your Redeemer's conflict see.
Watch with him one bitter hour;
turn not from his griefs away;
learn from Jesus Christ to pray.**

**Follow to the judgment hall,
view the Lord of life arraigned;
oh, the wormwood and the gall!
Oh, the pangs his soul sustained!
Shun not suff'ring, shame, or loss;
learn from him to bear the cross.**

[The first candle is extinguished followed by
a short time of silent prayer and meditation.]

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

* Prayers of Intercession

Turning our hearts to God who is gracious and merciful,
we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Merciful God, refresh the hearts of your faithful people
across all lands and generations.
Rescue your church from affliction, hardship, or persecution.
Remove all obstacles standing in the way of our witness
to your grace, mercy, and everlasting love.
Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Renewing God, bless all wilderness places and all inhabitants of the land.
Protect untouched ecosystems, satisfy parched places,
and strengthen roots and seeds beneath the soil
that await their time to flourish.
Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Restoring God, rebuild and repair nations ravaged by war or famine.
Humble the hearts of governments and authorities,
that they loose the bonds of injustice and liberate the oppressed.
Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Generous God, provide bread for the hungry,
shelter for the homeless, and protection for the vulnerable.
Listen to the cries of all who are abused, imprisoned,
and who suffer due to pain anxiety, or illness.
Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Faithful God, renew our practices of devotion and discipleship.
Make us generous in giving, steadfast in prayer,
and attentive to your grace amid many distractions.
Be with those who prepare for baptism and affirmation of baptism.
Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Redeeming God, you raise us from the dust of death
and mark us with the cross of salvation.
Strengthen us by the faithfulness of the saints.
Restore our joy and lead us by your bountiful grace.
Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

According to your steadfast love, O God,
hear these and all our prayers as we commend them to you;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

* Sharing the Peace

The peace of the Lord be with you. **And also with you.**
*We invite you to share the peace with those with you
and with us with "thumbs up" or comments on our Facebook page.
Text someone you care about.*

* Words of Institution

* 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;**



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Bulletin Acknowledgements

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and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

*** Invitation to Communion**

Jesus draws the whole world to himself.
Come to this meal and be fed.

Communion is Received

The body of Christ, given for you

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

Amen.

“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence”

ELW #490 vs. 1, 2

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly-minded,
for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descending
comes full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary,
as of old on earth he stood,
Lord of lords in human vesture,
in the body and the blood,
he will give to all the faithful
his own self for heav'nly food.

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The body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
Strengthens you and keeps you in his grace.
Amen.

*** Prayer after Communion**

God of steadfast love,
at this table you gather your people
into one body for the sake of the world.
Send us in the power of your Spirit,
that our lives bear witness
to the love that has made us new
in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

WE GO INTO THE WORLD

*** Blessing**

You are what God made you to be:
created in Christ Jesus for good works,
chosen as holy and beloved,
freed to serve your neighbor.

God bless you ✝ that you may be a blessing,
in the name of the holy and life-giving Trinity.
Amen.

*** Dismissal**

Go in peace. Share the good news.
Thanks be to God.