

Pastor Kory's Page

Faith Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, SD

January 30 & 31, 2016

Crossing into Lent



It's hard to believe that at the end of January we're just a week and a half from the beginning of Lent! Lent is a more somber season of preparation prior to Holy Week and Easter. Worship services during Lent focus on the suffering and death of our Savior.

The forty-day season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 10.

We will gather to worship and receive

the Lord's Supper at both 12:00 and 6:30 p.m. on Ash Wednesday. This year we will try introducing something new in our Ash Wednesday services: the imposition of ashes.

The imposition of ashes is a simple rite with rich meaning and history. Christians have been observing Ash Wednesday with the imposition of ashes since the 7th century. The practice became widespread throughout the Church by the 10th century. Although it may be associated with Roman Catholicism, Lutheran Christians have used the imposition of ashes for centuries.

So what exactly is the imposition of ashes? At the beginning of our Ash Wednesday services, a few words of introduction will be spoken. Then the worshippers will be invited to come forward to have the pastor make the sign of the cross on their forehead. As he does so, the pastor will say, **"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."**

Please note that the imposition of ashes is *optional*. Also, another alternative is for the pastor to make the sign of the cross on the back of your hand rather than on your forehead.

The congregation will also sing a hymn during the imposition of ashes and the service will then proceed into Confession and Absolution.

What is the significance of ashes? Ashes are a biblical symbol of mortality and repentance. The words spoken by the pastor as the ashes are applied come from Genesis 3:19, when the Lord broke the news to Adam and Eve that they were now subject to death (returning to the dust) in consequence for their sin. As we

cross into the season of Lent, we do so remembering that mortality is still a consequence for *our* sin.

In the Old Testament, ashes were also associated with *grief*. Job sat in ashes during his afflictions (Job 2:8). Mordecai did the same when he learned of the Persians' plans to wipe out the Jewish people (Esther 4:1). Daniel marked his confession with ashes (Daniel 9:3).

After being confronted and put in his place by the Lord, Job said, "I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). As we wear ashes for a little while, it's an added reminder for us of our Lord's call to *repent*, to grieve over our sinfulness, and to turn to Him for mercy and forgiveness and strength to change our ways.

Even though the imposition of ashes is a somber ritual, it also points our hearts to the Gospel. After all, the mark placed upon you is a *cross*, just as the sign of the cross was made upon your forehead and upon your heart at your baptism, marking you as God's child, redeemed by Christ the crucified!

Lent is a journey toward the cross. We know and trust that Christ suffered on a cross because of you and me and our sin. But we also know and trust that Christ suffered to wipe away our sin once and for all and that He rose from the dead, showing that God the Father accepted His sacrifice on our behalf.

After the service on Ash Wednesday, it's okay for you to wash away the ashes! As you do so, remember that the Lord has also washed away the darkness of your sin through the water and Word of Holy Baptism!

Finally, I'd like to personally invite you to worship, especially in our midweek Lenten services. Lent is a great season to renew your faith, to change some habits, and to draw closer to your Savior. Our midweek services will be based on Luke chapters 22 & 23. (You may want to read these passages devotionally during this Lenten season.) Our theme, **"Places of the Passion,"** will focus not only on scenes during Christ's suffering, but also on how *you* have a place at your Lord's Table, in your Lord's family, and in your Lord's loving heart. As we explore Luke's Gospel, we'll see Christ's strength in the midst of our weakness and His timeless love in the midst of our temporal darkness. Together, we'll look to the cross (even a cross made of ashes!) as the most amazing place of God's grace!

Peace in Christ,

Pastor Kory Janneke