



St. Paul United Church of Christ

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Rev. Becky Erb Strang-Senior Pastor

Roland Dicke-Council President

Welcome to St. Paul UCC, we are glad you are here!!

Whether you are worshipping online or in person, Welcome, one and all, to this time of worship. We are blessed to have you with us today.

March 2, 2022
Ash Wednesday

Worship Leaders

Ministers

Rev. Becky Erb Strang

Becky Quellhorst

Tracy Oldiges

Jim Strang

Ann Kuhn

The Congregation

Senior Pastor

Organist

Sr. Deacon

Chancel/Music Director

Worship Leader

LIGHTING OF CANDLES: You are invited to light a candle or candles at home in preparation for worship.

WORDS OF GREETING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: On Ash Wednesday, we are invited to a time of self-examination.

People: We are invited to experience the season of Lent.

Leader: We are invited to give up that which keeps us from following God.

People: We are invited to take part in a spiritual renewal.

Leader: We are invited to make time for a closer walk with God.

People: We are invited to come and worship our God.

OPENING HYMN

Just As I Am

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Just As I Am

354

1 Just as I am, with - out one plea
2 Just as I am, and wait - ing not
3 Just as I am, though tossed a - bout
4 Just as I am, thou wilt re - ceive,

but to that thy blood was shed for me,
with rid man - y a con - flict, of one dark blot,
wilt wel - come, par - don, cleanse, re - lieve;

and that thou bidd'st me come to thee,
fight - ings whose blood fears can cleanse each spot,
be - cause thy prom - ise I be - lieve,

O Lamb of God, I come! I come!
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

INVOCATION (in unison)

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that, lamenting our sins and acknowledging our brokenness, we may receive from you, the God of all mercy, perfect forgiveness and peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHANCEL CHOIR ANTHEM

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: Psalm 23

(The Message)

God, my shepherd!

I don't need a thing.

*You have bedded me down in lush meadows,
you find me quiet pools to drink from.*

*True to your word,
you let me catch my breath
and send me in the right direction.*

*⁴ Even when the way goes through
Death Valley,*

*I'm not afraid
when you walk at my side.*

*Your trusty shepherd's crook
makes me feel secure.*

*⁵ You serve me a six-course dinner
right in front of my enemies.*

*You revive my drooping head;
my cup brims with blessing.*

*⁶ Your beauty and love chase after me
every day of my life.*

*I'm back home in the house of God
for the rest of my life.*

Jesus said: "Let me set this before you as plainly as I can. If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he's up to no good—a sheep rustler! The shepherd walks right up to the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice. They won't follow a stranger's voice but will scatter because they aren't used to the sound of it."

⁶⁻¹⁰ Jesus told this simple story, but they had no idea what he was talking about. So he tried again. "I'll be explicit, then. I am the Gate for the sheep. All those others are up to no good—sheep stealers, every one of them. But the sheep didn't listen to them. I am the Gate. Anyone who goes through me will be cared for—will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.

¹¹⁻¹³ "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd puts the sheep before himself, sacrifices himself if necessary. A hired man is not a real shepherd. The sheep mean nothing to him. He sees a wolf come and runs for it, leaving the sheep to be ravaged and scattered by the wolf. He's only in it for the money. The sheep don't matter to him.

¹⁴⁻¹⁸ "I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own sheep and my own sheep know me. In the same way, the Father knows me and I know the Father. I put the sheep before myself, sacrificing myself if necessary. You need to know that I have other sheep in addition to those in this pen. I need to gather and bring them, too. They'll also recognize my voice. Then it will be one flock, one Shepherd. This is why the Father loves me: because I freely lay down my life. And so I am free to take it up again. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will. I have the right to lay it down; I also have the right to take it up again. I received this authority personally from my Father."

RESPONSE

Leader: The Word of God for the people of God!

People: God is still speaking! Thanks be to God!

SERMON

The Good Shepherd

Rev. Becky Erb Strang

Today, Christian Churches throughout the world are celebrating Ash Wednesday with communion and ashes and prayers of repentance as we begin our Lenten journey. For here is the truth: as we move into Lent, we need to be reminded that forever and ever, Jesus is our shepherd—the Good Shepherd of our lives.

Indeed, Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd. Translated from the Greek, “good” means “model”—Jesus is the model shepherd, the true shepherd. As a shepherd, Christ cares for us always. The shepherd does not sleep and will sacrifice all to protect the flock.

When Jesus says he knows both his flock and God, he speaks relationally. “Knowing” in the ancient world meant less about cognitive skills and more about entering into deep relationships—with us and with God.

As we enter Lent, we rejoice that Jesus guides us and loves us, calls us and cares for us—out of his deep and abiding love for us and for his divine Parent & Creator. We rejoice that Jesus is our Good Shepherd who will seek us out when we wander and will care for us when we fall. We rejoice that Jesus calls us his own, knowing us with the fullness of love.

If Jesus is the Good Shepherd, we are, indeed, the sheep. Often this text from the Gospel of John is used to point to ways we can shepherd and care for one another. And that really shouldn’t surprise us because the word “pastor” comes from “shepherd.” But, looking closely, today’s Gospel lesson does not speak of **our** role as shepherds to one another. NO: forever and always, we are the sheep of the flock, the children at Jesus’ knee, the lost and alone and hurting ones. Forever and always, Christians call Jesus our Shepherd because he calls us and gathers us into a community of love.

This life in community is what discipleship is all about. As disciples of Christ, as Christians, we are called NOT to shepherd one another, but

to live fully in community, with Christ Jesus as our shepherd, guide, and friend.

Lent gives us the gift of these six weeks to be sheep. I'm serious. But the good news is this: we are not solitary sheep. We are not sheep by ourselves. We are part of the flock, this community, as together, we look to Jesus to be our model and our guide. We have been given the gift of these six weeks to grow and deepen our relationships with Jesus AND one another.

How do we make this happen? According to the Gospel of John, LOVE is the key. Throughout the gospel, we hear of God's love for the world, God's love for Jesus, and our own call to love one another. When we live as people who are loved and share that love with others, we are living without borders. Our lines and lives are stretched to include ALL of creation into Jesus' open arms of love.

And did you pay close attention to the end of today's lesson? We are not the only sheep Jesus seeks. There are other sheep in other pens and pastures—a reminder that WE don't get to choose who Jesus loves and calls. Nor do we get to choose who we love—for all are worthy of love and acceptance and forgiveness and grace: no matter what.

During Lent, we are called to live NOT as shepherds, but as a flock of love, as a community of faith, as children in need of Christ's healing light.

In a few minutes, you will have the opportunity to receive the gift of Holy Communion. You will have the opportunity to receive ashes. Know this: these are gifts of love FOR YOU from Jesus as we journey with him to Jerusalem. Amen.

WE RESPOND WITH OUR GIFTS

OFFERING INVITATION: Give to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him. Let each of us use whatever gift we have received, faithfully sharing God's grace in many forms.

DOXOLOGY

Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow 34

The image shows a musical score for the hymn 'Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow'. It is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score consists of two systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The lyrics are: 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host: praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.' Above the treble staff, guitar chords are indicated: G, D, Em, Bm, Em, D, G, D, Em, C, G, D. Above the second treble staff, more chords are indicated: Em, D/F#, G, D, G/B, C, F#dim/A, G, Em, D, Am, G/B, D7, G.

WORDS: *Doxology*, Thomas Ken (1637-1711)
MUSIC: Louis Bourgeois (ca. 1510-1561), *Genevan Psalter*, 1551

OLD 100th
L.M.

OFFERTORY PRAYER (in unison)

Receive us, O Giving Lord, as your willing servants. Use the gifts of our talents, money, time and energy to bring restoration and reconciliation to this world. May this season of Lent be a time when we reassess all we have been given and what we have to share. Amen.

SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION

WORDS OF INVITATION: On this holy night, we remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return. We also remember that these days of Lent bring us to Holy Week: Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Morn. We cannot get to Easter's alleluia's except by the way of the cross, the way of Christ Jesus.

And it is to his table you are invited this night. It is his grace that nourishes us with a taste of bread and wine. It is his love that calls us to gather in thanksgiving: in the midst of ashes AND alleluias.

COMMUNION PRAYER (unison)

We thank you, God, for Jesus, who lived among us, uncovering your presence. We thank you that you stamped his death with victory, and that life, not death, was the final word. We ask now that you bless us as we share this bread that we may be

nourished by that same unbounded love and so be encouraged to be your servants in the world. Amen.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION: On the night Jesus was betrayed, he sat with his disciples at the Passover Meal. At that meal, he took bread, blessed and broke it, giving it to his disciples saying, “This is my body broken for you. Do this in memory of me.” In the same way, after supper, he took the cup saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it for the forgiveness of sins.”

BREAD: The Body of Christ broken for you! Take and eat.

CUP: The Cup of Blessing poured out for you! Take and drink.

MEANING OF ASHES

Ashes have been placed upon the foreheads of Christians for centuries on the first day of Lent. We are reminded of the words from Genesis: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Marked by ashes, we are reminded of our mortality and the frailty of our existence on earth. Like the grass that flourishes in the morning, we fade and wither at night.

Marked by ashes, we are reminded that we are not God and that we are not in control of our lives.

Marked by ashes, we are reminded that we bear the marks of a fire burned. The remaining ash is like the charred remains of a building. The building is long gone—the fire has blazed brightly. Now, what remains is charred and useless.

Marked by ashes, we are reminded of the palms of Christ’s triumphant entry—now a distant memory. Marked by ashes, we accept our own participation in Christ’s suffering.

Marked by ashes, we are reminded that we are unclean and unpresentable to God as we really are. Marked by ashes, we witness a need to cleansing, renewing, and restoring of our spirits and our lives. Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. Turn away from your sins and believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES: *Imposition of ashes will take place at the front of the sanctuary. If you prefer ashes imposed on the back of hand instead of forehead, hold your hand up for the pastor.* Remember that you are

dust, and to dust you shall return. Turn away from your sins and believe the good news of the Gospel. Amen.

ACT OF PENITENCE AND RECONCILIATION

Leader: In fear, but also in hope, we come together bearing ashes. The planet is dying in our hands. People turn to each other for food and strength only to be shoved away. Each day we deal in death, yet pretend that all is well. Let us take forty days to look hard at our so-called goodness and see what it covers up. Then we will join together in taking up the cross of living in the world as it is, for there is only one earth, as far as we know, only one human race. Let us pray.

People: That as disciples of Christ we might start using our hands, feet, money, time, and energy for the good of the poor, let us pray to the God of mercy.

Leader: Hear our prayer, O God.

People: That citizens everywhere may realize that care for their neighbor consists of more than the mere giving of money, let us pray to the God of mercy.

Leader: Hear our prayer, O God.

People: For the needy, that they may not have to remain despondent and alone, let us pray to the God of mercy.

Leader: Hear our prayer, O God.

People: For all of us here that we may be honest enough to admit what we are selfish about, and what we can do to remedy our lack of love, let us pray to the God of mercy.

Leader: Hear our prayer, O God.

People: Merciful God, the ashes are our pledge to take up the cross of life. We came from the earth and we will go back to it. In the meantime, beginning these forty days, we will try to live here and make it a better home for everybody. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days 252

N.C. F $\frac{C}{F}$ F $\frac{Bb}{F}$ F $\frac{C}{E}$ Dm C $\frac{C}{Bb}$ $\frac{F}{A}$ Am

1 Lord, who through-out these for - ty days for us did fast and pray,
 2 As you with Sa - tan did con - tend, and did the vic - tory win,
 3 As you did hun - ger and did thirst, so teach us, gra - cious Lord,
 4 And thro' these days of pen - i - tence, and thro' your Pas - sion - tide,
 5 A - bide with us, that through this life of doubts and hope and pain,

Am Dm $\frac{C}{E}$ $\frac{Dm}{F}$ Am Bb $\frac{Bb}{D}$ F F \sharp F $\frac{Bb}{C}$ $\frac{F}{C}$ C7 Fsus F

teach us with you to mourn our sins and close by you to stay.
 O give us strength in you to fight, in you to con - quer sin.
 to die to self, and so to live by your most ho - ly Word.
 for - ev - er - more, in life and death, O Lord, with us a - bide.
 an Eas - ter of un - end - ing joy we may at last at - tain!

WORDS: Claudia F. Hernaman (1838-1898), alt.

MUSIC: American melody, adapt.; harm. Annabel Morris Buchanan (1889-1983)

LAND OF REST
C.M.

BENEDICTION:

Leader: Holy God, through the discipline of these forty days, make your Spirit's cleansing fire burn within us.

People: Lift us from the dying embers of our inattention.

Leader: Mark us with the sign of your holy passion.

People: Make us ready to respond to the call of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

POSTLUDE