



**Ash Wednesday Taize Service  
February 17, 2021**

**Again & Again: We Are Invited**



*Invited In by Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman*

“From dust you came, and to dust you shall return.” - Genesis 3:19b

“May our versions of what is enough to live a beautiful life rise from any embers left in the ashes of the old.” - Anonymous

“Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. - Rumi

**What you will need for service –**

In your Lenten kits: A candle or any candle you have in your home;  
Ashes (If you do not have ashes you can also take some potting soil mixed with a little water). Know that with or without ashes you can receive this blessing all you need is a willing and open heart.

## **WELCOME**

Blessings and welcome. My name is Elisa Lucozzi, pastor to Guilford Community Church. You are invited this evening both by God and by the beloved community that is Guilford Community Church to share this sacred time. Just a few things about the service before we begin.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent which is the 40 days leading up to Easter. This holy season within the Church is meant to be a time of refocusing on our spiritual practices, as a way of preparing for Easter. We begin the season of Lent with Ash Wednesday, which is meant to remind us of our need for forgiveness, our mortality, and of our need to turn our hearts back to God.

We come to Ash Wednesday this year, so deeply and profoundly reminded of our own mortality, as we stand in grief of the too many we have lost to COVID, the too many we have lost to violence and hatred. We begin this Lenten season feeling as if we have already gone through the longest Lent of our lives – trapped in the wilderness, tempted, isolated, with barely enough to sustain our most basic needs. Still, I'd like to invite you to not turn away from the starkness of this time we find ourselves in, to see what might be found there, what might be revealed there, even buried in the dust of what is left after everything we once thought we could not survive without is burned away.

We'll be worshipping this evening in the style of Taizé. The Taizé Community is an ecumenical Christian monastery in France. One of its trademarks is the singing of distinctive prayers during candlelit services. Taizé music highlights simple phrases, usually lines from the Psalms or other pieces of Scripture, sung repeatedly. The repetition is designed to help meditation and prayer. I invite you now to settle into the presence of God this evening. Get comfortable, feel free to close your eyes, there is no sheet music you'll need. Whenever we sing, I will begin, and you can join in whenever you'd like.

Now let us begin as we always do, by acknowledging and honoring this land we occupy, by honoring and acknowledging those First Nation people to whom this land belongs:

We gather here on the bank of the Broad Brook  
In the shadow of the great Mount Wantastiquet  
In the valley of the rushing Connecticut  
to worship and discern together the call of God  
to the United Church of Christ for these days.

Let us know that we do so on the hunting grounds  
and homelands of the Mahican and Penacook people,  
as well as the southernmost members of the Abenaki Tribe.  
These people used this land since time immemorial  
and are still among us in the present.  
We offer them our gratitude and respect,  
our repentance and hope in solidarity with them...

It is a Holy Communion we share of life on earth,  
of past and present, of pain and reconciliation,  
of mystery and majesty...let us begin.

## **SILENT MEDITATION & THE LIGHTING OF CANDLES**

### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: We are invited -

**All: into the story,  
into this place,  
into this hour of worship.**

One: We are invited -

**All: into reflection,  
into community,  
into our own Spiritual journeys.**

One: We are invited -

**All: the broken and bruised, the hopeful, the new,  
the faithful, the doubting, the wondering, the waiting.**

One: We are invited -

**All: because God so loved;**

One: So, listen, trust the invitation, and bring your whole self.

**All: All are invited here.**

**Taizé Prayer:** "Come and Fill Our Hearts" (Sung 3x)

Come and fill our hearts with your peace. You alone, Oh Lord, are Holy. Come  
and fill our hearts with your peace. Alleluia.

### **OPENING PRAYER:**

Creator God,  
There is a rumbling in us that won't let go.  
It stirs in us like the wind stirs leaves - inviting us to move, drawing us forth.

When we're quiet, we know that rumble is the Holy Spirit, dancing love awake  
in us.  
So we're here.  
And we're still.

And we're quiet.  
And on this first day of Lent, we're asking You to draw near.  
As we hear Your Scripture read aloud, open the door for us to move.  
Invite us in. Rumble us awake.  
Gratefully we pray, Amen.

### **PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION**

Ash Wednesday is a special day because it marks the start of something new.  
We are standing at the door of a journey into deeper faith, and God is inviting  
us in.

However, we know that we cannot grow deeper and be transformed without  
God's help. So, as we begin this season, we confess together, asking for God's  
participation in this new beginning. We are asking God to hold open the door.  
Let us pray:

### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

One: Holy God -  
we know that You are near,  
For You are always here, gathered among us, just a breath away.  
And despite knowing Your nearness, we still stumble over ourselves, unsure of  
how to pray.

**All: Bring our hearts into the room.**

One: So often we talk to You like a stranger,  
Praying prayers of small talk about the weather and surface level concerns. We  
keep genuine fear and doubt tucked into corners, out of sight, out of mind.

**All: Bring our hearts into the room.**

One: And so often we try to think our way to You,  
as if we could use logic or our minds alone to explain Your great unknown. We  
forget what we knew as children; we forget how to feel our way to You.

**All: Bring our hearts into the room.**

One: And too regularly, we limit our experience of You to one hour on a  
Sunday, missing Your constant invitation into the Holiness all around us.

Forgive us. Guide us.

**All: Bring our hearts into the room.**

One: We are here, God. We want to begin again.

**All: Bring our hearts into the room. Amen.**

One: Friends, whether you are standing at the door of a deeper faith journey, unsure of what comes next, or running your way through that threshold, you are claimed, forgiven, and loved by God.

**All: Again and again, we are forgiven. Again and again, we are loved. Again and again, we are invited in.**

One: Thanks be to God for a love like that.

**All: Amen.**

**Taizé Prayer:** "O Lord Here My Prayer" (Sung 3x)

O Lord, hear my prayer. O Lord hear my prayer. When I call, answer me. O Lord hear my prayer. O Lord hear my prayer. Come and listen to me.

## **SCRIPTURE READING**

**Hear these words from Christ from the Gospel of Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)**

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

**Now hear those same words again in a different way. (The Message)**

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me - watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of Grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

**Isaiah 58: 1-12 on True Fasting**

"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<sup>[a]</sup> 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 in 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.

**Taizé Prayer:** “Bless the Lord My Soul” (Sung 3x)

Bless the Lord, my soul, and Bless God's holy name. Bless the Lord, my soul,  
who leads me into life.

## **AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

We begin this journey in faith, even amidst our doubts, and so we proclaim this  
faith together:

**We believe in an inviting God  
who invites the poor and the sick,  
the outcast and the lonely,  
the immigrant and the refugee,  
the awkward and the abrasive,  
the young and the innocent.**

**We believe God invites the best and the worst - in all of us.**

**We believe God invites us to: a life of faith,  
a crowded table,  
a messy church,**

**a deeper truth,  
a resilient joy,  
a place to belong,  
a family among strangers,  
a world that is just,  
and a love that knows no bounds.**

**We believe this invitation exists for all people. We believe this invitation  
exists for us.**

**And when we miss the call or ignore the invite,  
we believe that God invites us again.**

**Thanks be to God for that invitational Spirit. Amen.**

Having affirmed our faith, let us say together the prayer that Jesus taught us  
using whatever words help us to embody its promise. May we bring about one  
small glimpse of the (kingdom) of God, a kin-dom where all are well, all are fed

and free, where all are whole, where all know love, where *all* know they are beloved.

Let us Pray: **Our Father, (Our Father/Mother, Our Creator) who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom (kin-dom) come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespasses against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom (kin-dom) and the power and the glory now and forever. Amen.**

**Taizé Prayer:** “Jesus Remember Me” (Sung 3x)

Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom. Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.

**READING:** “Blessing the Dust for Ash Wednesday” by Jan Richardson

All those days  
you felt like dust,  
like dirt,  
as if all you had to do  
was turn your face  
toward the wind  
and be scattered  
to the four corners  
or swept away  
by the smallest breath  
as insubstantial—  
did you not know  
what the Holy One  
can do with dust?  
This is the day  
we freely say  
we are scorched.  
This is the hour  
we are marked  
by what has made it  
through the burning.  
This is the moment  
we ask for the blessing  
that lives within

the ancient ashes,  
that makes its home  
inside the soil of  
this sacred earth.  
So let us be marked  
not for sorrow.  
And let us be marked  
not for shame.  
Let us be marked  
not for false humility  
or for thinking  
we are less  
than we are  
but for claiming  
what God can do  
within the dust,  
within the dirt,  
within the stuff  
of which the world  
is made  
and the stars that blaze  
in our bones  
and the galaxies that spiral  
inside the smudge  
we bear.

**SUNG PRAYER:** “Lord Prepare Me to Be A Sanctuary” by Randy Lynn Scruggs & John W Thompson (Sung 3x)

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary. Pure and holy, tried and true. With thanksgiving, I'll be a living Sanctuary for You.

**IMPOSITION OF ASHES**

You are invited to use your ashes or soil to mark your forehead or the back of your hand with a cross saying these words “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” or “Remember that you were made from Love and to Love you shall return.”

**ASSURANCE OF GRACE**

Our God is ever-merciful. In infinite grace, God made us and called us good. We are good. In infinite compassion, God gave us the Christ, who said, “You are good.” We are good. We are already forgiven, even before we asked. Receive and accept the forgiveness of God through the grace of Jesus the Christ.

**READING:** “Troubled?” by Hafiz

Troubled?  
Then stay with me, for I am not.  
Lonely?  
A thousand naked amorous ones dwell in  
ancient caves  
beneath my Eye.  
Riches?  
Here's the pick:  
My whole body is an  
Emerald that begs:  
"Take me."  
Write all that bothers you  
On a parchment.  
Offer it to God.  
Even from this distance of a  
Millennium, I can reach out the  
Flame from my heart  
into your life  
And turn  
all that frightens  
You  
into  
Holy Incense  
Ash.

**SUNG PRAYER:** "Take, O Take Me As I Am" Chant by John L. Bell (Sung 3x)  
Take, O take me as I am. Summon out what I shall be. Set your seal upon my  
heart and live in me.

**BENEDICTION:** To make this a kinesthetic prayer, circle or underline any  
phrases that particularly move you or stand out to you.

God of open doors,  
open arms,  
and open conversations,  
we know  
deep in our souls  
that You are forever inviting us in.  
Again and again,  
You invite us to take another step closer,  
another step deeper,  
another step further,  
in this journey of faith.  
So, with Your invitation in our hands,  
we pray for strength and wisdom.  
Show us the next right step in this journey. We are here.  
You are here.

This is Holy ground.  
May this Holy Lenten journey begin  
Once again.  
Gratefully we pray,  
Amen.

*Unless otherwise noted all prayers and worship materials were created by A Sanctified Art, LLC for the Again & Again: A Lenten Refrain worship series. Used with permission.*

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### **For Further Prayer and Reflection:**

#### ***From A Sanctified Art:***

*Read*

Genesis 3:19b

“From dust you came, and to dust you shall return.”

*Reflect*

This verse—spoken to us when we receive the imposition of ashes on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday— reminds us of our humanity. So, in full honesty, make a list of 5-10 challenges you are struggling with, recognizing that life is messy and life is complicated. Name anything that is hard or heavy in this moment. Write them down in your journal or on the doodle page (*included at the end of this bulletin*). Challenge yourself to think of the core emotion underlying each challenge. For example, instead of simply saying, “I’m busy,” perhaps you might confess: “I overcommit myself because I worry that others will think I’m selfish if I say no.” Name your challenges and your confessions, offering them all to God.

Take a moment to look over your list. Ask God for forgiveness for the things you can control. Ask God for grace for the things you cannot.

*Watch*

Watch one (or both!) of the following short videos. Both videos are invitations to a richer, more meaningful, more intentional life.

[“A Pep Talk from Kid President to You”](#) *Created by Kid President and Brad Montague. Published by SoulPancake.*

[“The Present”](#)

“The Present” is a thesis short from the Institute of Animation, Visual Effects

and Digital Postproduction at the Filmakademie Baden-Wuerttemberg in Ludwigsburg, Germany.

### *Write*

Having read Scripture and poetry, named the challenges you are facing, and watched these invitational videos, now write down 5-10 hopes you have for this Lenten season. Allow these videos to be encouragement for living life with intention. You can write your hopes in your journal or on your doodle page.

As you write, consider these written hopes to be intentions that you are setting for the six weeks ahead. These are not intended to be aimless wishes on stars, but instead, thoughtful intentions for “your one wild and precious life.” (Quoted from Mary Oliver’s Poem, “A Summer’s Day”)

### **Poems for further reflection:**

From: “Hush Don’t Say Anything to God: Passionate Poems of Rumi”  
Translated by Sharam Shiva

It is your turn now,  
you waited, you were patient.  
The time has come,  
for us to polish you.  
We will transform your inner pearl  
into a house of fire.  
You’re a gold mine.  
Did you know that,  
hidden in the dirt of the earth?  
It is your turn now,  
to be placed in fire.  
Let us cremate your impurities.

“Enfleshed: An Ash Wednesday Poem” by M. Barclay

It's not at all about the need to  
think of ourselves as awful.  
For many of us, that already comes  
too easy.  
If you don't need a smear across  
your forehead  
because you wear it on your heart  
every day  
hear these words:  
You are not awful.  
God doesn't think you're awful.  
You were not created awful.  
There's nothing divine that is born  
from believing you are awful.  
If this is hard for you to accept, to  
believe,  
to hold deeply in your smeared  
heart,  
spend some time with that this  
season.  
You have been lied to.  
Heal.  
Resist.  
Unlearn those prayers that make  
you small.  
Come alive again before you  
remember death.  
But then, when you do,  
when you remember you are good,  
don't settle for believing the journey  
is complete.  
It was never only yours to begin  
with.  
Let it lead you to questions of us:  
Why do we, so good, turn on each  
other?  
Why do we, so good, allow for evil to

flourish  
through white supremacy  
or patriarchy  
or poverty  
or queer and transphobia?  
Created good.  
Created good.  
Created good.  
But collectively invested in evil.  
In its stories.  
In its profits.  
In its familiar.  
To re-member  
is a collective occasion.  
A communal acknowledgment  
of the choices before us.  
Let the remember-ing  
that we are dust  
and to dust we will return  
be a reckoning with our inseparable  
lives and deaths  
be an apology for all we have chosen  
instead of each other  
be a grounding in the promise  
that we come from holy soil.  
Holy dirt.  
Holy dust.  
Created good.  
In need of tending.  
Rich with potential for beauty.  
Hungry for nutrients.  
Wild and unruly.  
Vulnerable.  
The dust births new life.  
The dust receives the dead.  
In the dust we find each other  
today or eventually.

AGAIN + AGAIN

# Ash Wednesday

WE ARE INVITED IN

I AM HERE.  
GOD IS HERE.  
THIS SPACE IS  
HOLY GROUND.



FROM YOU CAME.  
TO DUST YOU SHALL RETURN.

START WITH HONESTY.  
.....  
WHAT IS HARD, HEAVY,  
— CHALLENGING? —

*intention*  
SETTING:

AMEN.

