

*The Congregational  
Church of Salisbury*  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



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*“Whoever you are,  
wherever you are on life’s journey:  
you are welcome here.”*

**SERVICE OF THE ASHES**

22 February 2023

*Ash Wednesday*

5:30pm

A TIME OF GATHERING

Welcome! In this church we try to be concerned about things that matter. It doesn't matter whether you are young or old. You need not be rich or smart. What matters is that you hunger to know an abundant life. We welcome you as you are, because we have experienced God's all-inclusive love, and we want everyone to share that gift.

THE ASH WEDNESDAY OBSERVANCE

In the Western Christian calendar, Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. On this day, worshipers are blessed with ashes, in the shape of a cross, which the worshiper traditionally retains until washing it off after sundown.

Ashes are used in Scripture as a sign of repentance, and throughout our tradition as a reminder of our mortality, echoing God's word to Adam and Eve as they were expelled from the garden: "From dust you were made, and to dust you shall return." These reminders of our sin and death — our current risk of spiritual death and our eventual physical demise — help us to focus on our new life in Jesus Christ, who forgives us, leads our spirits into union with God, and ultimately conquers death itself.

The ashes used in this evening's service were made from the palms reserved from last year's Palm Sunday service.

*Tonight's liturgy is adapted from worship materials by  
the Rev. Rex A.E. Hunt ([rexaehuntprogressivelgy.com](http://rexaehuntprogressivelgy.com)) and by the Rev. Dr. William R.G. Loader.*

## WE GATHER IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

GATHERING MUSIC

“Sing Praises, All You Peoples”

The image shows a musical score for the hymn "Sing Praises, All You Peoples". It consists of two systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system begins with a treble clef and a bass clef. The vocal line starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The piano accompaniment starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note B3. The second system continues the melody and accompaniment, ending with a double bar line. The lyrics are: "Sing prais-es, all you peo-les, sing prais-es to the Lord. Sing prais - es, all you peo - ples, sing prais - es to the Lord. Sing".

*Text: Psalm 102; Taizé Community, 1982; Tune: Jacques Berthier, 1923-1994 © 1982, Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., agent. All rights reserved. Reprinted under OneLicense.net A-725033.*

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP (from *Psalm 51*)

ONE: Have mercy on me, O God,  
In keeping with Your steadfast love;

**ALL: In Your abundant compassion,**

**Remove from Your memory my straying from Your ways.**

O Holy One, open my lips,  
And my mouth will rejoice in You.

**For You have no delight in rituals of restoration;**

**If I were to give a burnt offering,**

**You would not be pleased.**

The sacrifice acceptable to the Eternal One is a supple spirit, open to God's ways;

**A heart that has broken its hold on the privileges of power, O God,**

**You will not spurn.**

RESPONSE IN SONG

“O Lord, Hear My Prayer”

O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer, When I call, an-swer me.

O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer, Come and lis-ten to me.

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INVITATION TO CONFESSION

Lent is a journey of deepening reflection and renewal, an opportunity to make new commitments in faith. We prepare for the journey by setting aside burdens that would weigh us down. Let us turn to God and confess our sin.

RESPONSIVE CONFESSION

ONE: For the times when we are too rushed to care, when we are too tired to bother, when we don't really listen, when we act from motives other than love,

**ALL: God, forgive us.**

*silence*

For deciding to avoid the sufferings of others,  
and our lack of outrage at injustice,

**God, forgive us.**

*silence*

For our failings in community, our limited understanding,

**God, forgive us.**

*silence*

For our deficits of forgiveness, openness, sensitivity,

**God, forgive us.**

*silence*

For the self-righteousness that denies guilt,  
and the self-interest that strangles compassion,

**God, forgive us.**

*silence*

RESPONSE IN SONG

“O Lord, Hear My Prayer”

The musical score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment line on a bass clef staff. The lyrics are: "O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer, When I call, an-swer me." and "O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer, Come and lis-ten to me." The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line and chords that support the vocal melody.

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## CALL TO THE JOURNEY

PSALM 51

ONE: Have mercy on me, O God,

**ALL: In keeping with Your steadfast love;**

In Your abundant compassion,

**Remove from Your memory my straying from Your ways.**

Sponge up my guilt;

**Cleanse me from my errors.**

For I know what I have done wrong,

**And I am ever conscious of my violations of Your trust in me.**

All the pain I have caused others,  
All the arrogance I have displayed,  
**Began in my disregard for Your path to Life.**

So that You are justified in condemning me,  
**And right to pass judgment.**

Indeed, I cannot help but stray,  
**I have ever been weak in my resolve.**

Yet You desire that I be true and reliable in my inward being;  
**Therefore sow in my secret heart  
the wisdom to know my utter dependence upon You.**

Purge me with herbs, and I shall be clean;  
**Wash me, and I shall be brighter than snow.**

Let me hear joy and gladness;  
**Let the bones that have been crushed by guilt rejoice.**

Turn Your face from my sins,  
**And sponge up all my guilt.**

Create for me a new beginning, O God,  
**And put an unshakable spirit within me.**

Do not cast me away from Your presence,  
**And do not take the holiness of Your spirit from me.**

Restore to me the joy of Your fullness of life,  
**And sustain in me a spirit of generosity and compassion.**

I will then teach the overbearing Your ways,  
**And those who have wandered will return to You.**

Deliver me from the taint of my past violence, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
**And my tongue will sing aloud of Your deliverance.**

O Holy One, open my lips,  
**And my mouth will rejoice in You.**

For You have no delight in rituals of restoration;  
**If I were to give a burnt offering, You would not be pleased.**

The sacrifice acceptable to the Eternal One is a supple spirit,  
open to God's ways;  
**A heart that has broken its hold on conceit, O God,  
You will not spurn.**

## PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

GOSPEL READING

Matthew 4:1-11

REFLECTION

ONE: Jesus' journey through the wilderness stands for the journey that each of us takes: tempted to turn away from what we know to be good and true; acknowledging that we face loneliness and times when life seems more desert than garden.

**ALL: My God, my God, why do I feel forsaken?**

*silence*

The ashes we wear remind us of our mortality. The burning that generates the ashes reflects the misdirected passions of abuse and the searing apathy which renders hope barren, and suppresses change.

**Forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**

*silence*

To take the sign of the cross on ourselves means to allow oneself to be stretched out wide in solidarity with the Christ and in compassion for all, even at great cost, and to believe against despair that hope can rise and life begin again.

**Into God's care, I commend my spirit.**

*silence*

THE ASHES

ONE: Ash Wednesday invites us to come back to earth. To wonder at the gift of life — my life; your life; our life — with the earth, the shared body of our existence.

**ALL: These ashes were once trees waving tall, miracles of creation.**

Once they were full of life. Now they are black and grey. Dry. Lifeless.

**But mixed with the oil and water of our baptism ash makes good fertilizer.**

It will help the seeds of the gospel take deeper root in us and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit: the harvest of justice, peace, and generosity.

**These are ashes worth wearing.**

May we accept this gift, and be blessed,  
and be assured we will be different at the end of this season.

**For from the burnt ashes will spring the green shoot of life  
and the purple flower of attentiveness to God.**

#### BLESSING

We pray:

**Bless these ashes.**

**May they be for us a symbol of our return to the earth.**

Bless us.

**May we be earthed in your everlasting love,  
as forgiven and forgiving people. Amen.**

#### IMPOSITION OF ASHES

*You are invited to come forward to be marked with the sign of the  
cross, or remain seated at prayer.*

#### PRAYER

We pray:

**Thank you, Holy One, for forgiveness and healing.**

**We are mindful of faith that sees possibilities,  
faith that endures,  
faith that inspires.**

Mindful of love's call to be faithful, to endure,  
to be generous and forgiving whatever the cost.

**Mindful of the hope of new life  
as we follow Jesus during this Lenten journey.  
Amen.**



## THE JOURNEY BEGINS

RESPONSE IN SONG

“O Lord, Hear My Prayer”

Two systems of musical notation in 4/4 time, G major. The first system contains the first line of lyrics: "O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer, When I call, an-swer me." The second system contains the second line: "O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer, Come and lis-ten to me." Each system has a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a bass clef staff. The lyrics are written below the treble clef staff.

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### BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

We travel in the power of love,  
ready to share our burdens and our joys.  
May we trust in the way of Christ  
and walk in Christ's *shalom*.

**And may the blessing of God go with us.**



*The Congregational Church of Salisbury*

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

*Whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey: you are welcome here.*

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