

**ECUMENICAL SERVICE OF EUCHARIST FOR ASH WEDNESDAY
COVENANT COMMUNITY WITH CHRISTCHURCH RAYLEIGH URC
PRESIDING: Revd Naomi Young–Rodas
PREACHER: Revd Dr Calvin T Samuel
Wednesday 17 February 2021**

1. Welcome & Introduction

Good Morning and welcome to this special covenant community online Service for Ash Wednesday to mark the beginning of Lent, shared with our friends from Christ Church Rayleigh URC.

We are internationally dispersed, we remain socially distant, we are ecumenically diverse, but we come together in worship as a covenant community of Christian sisters and brothers.

I'm Calvin Samuel, Methodist minister for the Essex towns of Hockley, Rochford and Rayleigh, on the edge of Southend. I'm delighted that my colleague, the Revd Naomi Young–Rodas the minister of Christ Church Rayleigh URC will be sharing with me in this service and presiding at Holy Communion

2. Hymn: Come Thou Fount of Every blessing

Tune my heart to sing Thy grace
Streams of mercy, never ceasing
Call for songs of loudest praise
Teach me some melodious sonnet
Sung by flaming tongues above
Praise the mount, I'm fixed upon it
Mount of Thy redeeming love.

Here I raise my Ebenezer
Hither by Thy great help I've come
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure
Safely to arrive at home
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it,
seal it from thy courts above!

Jesus sought me when a stranger
Wandering from the fold of God
He, to rescue me from danger
Interposed His precious blood

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it,
seal it from thy courts above!

O to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it,
seal it from thy courts above!

Robert Robinson (1735–1790)

3. Call to Worship

As we come to Ash Wednesday liturgy please respond using the words in yellow which appear on screen, or the text in **bold type**, if you're working from a transcript.

Let us worship God.

God sent Christ into the world
not to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.
God's love endures forever.

God is our refuge and strength,
a present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear
though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though the waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its tumult.
God's love endures forever.

4. Lord, have mercy from the Masse Basque, by Ian de Massini (1959 -)

5. Collect for Ash Wednesday – CTS

Let us pray.

Almighty and merciful God,
you hate nothing that you have made,
and forgiver the sins of all who are penitent.
Create in us new and contrite hearts,
so that when we turn to you
and confess our sins we may receive
your full and perfect forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

6. Introduction to Ash Wednesday – CTS

Ash Wednesday is significant for Christians of all denominations, marking the beginning of Lent the season penitence which leads up to Easter.

The season of Lent lasts for 46 days from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, enabling 40 days of Lent which do not include Sundays. The 40 days of Lent are in remembrance of the 40 days Jesus fasted in the wilderness whilst overcoming temptation, immediately before he began his ministry.

Lent is therefore a season of fasting in which we choose to give up chocolate or meat, alcohol or television, or even sex not because these things are bad, for they are part of God's good gift. Rather because we hope that in abstaining for a season we might give greater attention to God, and in due season appreciate all of God's good gifts with thanksgiving.

Ash Wednesday is a solemn reminder of human mortality and the need for reconciliation with God. The practices of Ash Wednesday, such as the placing of ashes in the sign of the cross on the foreheads or hands of the penitent, go back to at least the fourth century.

Later in the service I will be inviting you, if you have some ash with you at home, to join me in making the sign of the cross on your foreheads or hands. If you're sharing in this service with others in your household, you might prefer to place the mark on each other reminding ourselves that we are from dust and to dust we shall one day return.

7. Hymn:

Be Thou My Vision

O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art
Thou my best thought, by day or by night
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord

Thou my great Father, and I thy true son
Thou in me dwelling and I with thee one

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise
Thou mine inheritance, now and always
Thou and thou only first in my heart
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art

High King of heaven, my victory won
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my vision, O ruler of all
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my vision, O ruler of all

*Irish, 8th century translated by
Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880–1931)
versified by Eleanor Henrietta Hull (1860–1935) (alt.)*

8. SCRIPTURE

Old Testament Lesson: Joel 2.1-2, 12-17

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near—
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness spread upon the mountains
a great and powerful army comes;
their like has never been from of old,
nor will be again after them
in ages to come.

Yet even now, says the LORD,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing.
Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering

for the LORD, your God?
Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sanctify a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation;
assemble the aged;
gather the children,
even infants at the breast.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her canopy.
Between the vestibule and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep.
Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD,
and do not make your heritage a mockery,
a byword among the nations.
Why should it be said among the peoples,
'Where is their God?'"

New Testament Lesson: Matthew 4.1–10

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

This is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God!

9. The Sermon – Calvin T Samuel

Turn this stone to bread. It hardly seems a bad thing. Nonetheless, this is how the classic account of the temptation of Jesus begins.

Jesus prepared for the beginning of his public ministry with a season of fasting and wrestling with temptation. Jesus is depicted as following in the footsteps of Moses and Elijah who faced similar seasons of fasting, prayer and wrestling with temptation. Today, we seek to follow in the footsteps of Jesus as we prepare for Easter with a season of fasting, prayer and wrestling with our own temptations.

TURN THIS STONE TO BREAD

Which brings us back to bread. Turn this stone to bread? Either the Tempter was having an off day or there is more to this suggestion. That, of course, is exactly how temptation works; there is always a catch, a hidden side. It looks simple and straightforward. It's not that bad. It's not like we're being asked to do something terrible. And why shouldn't you be able to have some bread anyways? Making bread is a good thing, isn't it? God did it in the wilderness is making manna, for heaven's sake. What could be so bad about making some bread?

On reflection, the tempter is not having such an off day after all. He is on form. This is a temptation that is so subtle that you almost don't even see it as temptation. And that is where we are at our most vulnerable. When we know that we are being tempted at least we know to be on the lookout. But when it is so subtle that we hardly even register it as a temptation that's the danger point.

So what is the temptation here? What's so bad about making bread? A couple of things. For Jesus the temptation to turn stone into bread was a temptation to use his power for himself rather than others. It was also a temptation to short circuit the process. You are the Son of God. Why should you have to go through the normal process of growth in submission and obedience? Why deny yourself for no reason? Bread is good. You want bread. There is an easier way. *Make some bread.* This is the temptation of privilege.

*Gracious God,
strengthen us when we are tempted to take the easy way,*

*sustain us as we seek to follow you along the narrow way,
and if we yield to temptation and sin, forgive us we pray,
Amen.*

THROW YOURSELF DOWN

If you are the Son of God throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the Temple. This, the second temptation, doesn't sound very tempting! Temptation works when there is something in it for us. That Jesus was tempted to turn stone into bread when he was hungry makes sense. What incentive would Jesus have had to jump from the Temple?

If he really were the Son of God, God would surely direct his angels to catch him. Any lingering doubts in Jesus' mind about his identity would be removed. Even better, such a sensational move, and in Jerusalem, the capital city, would be a great way to announce his presence to the world. He'd never have to buy his own drinks down the pub again! This is the temptation of protection. God should protect me from bad things happening to me.

Jesus declined to leap, not because he doubted God's capacity to catch him but because he saw this temptation for what it was; an attempt to force God's hand. This would not have been a leap of faith. It would have been to seek to force God to engage on his terms. So Jesus says, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'

There are times when it's appropriate to put God to the test and moments in life when a leap of faith is required; when we choose to take the risk of following the requirements of our faith as best we understand them. However, there are far more occasions when we simply need to trust God to sustain us where we are, whether the pinnacle of the temple or the pit of despair. The challenge is to know which is which.

*Loving God,
give us the clarity of vision
and the courage of heart
to take a leap of faith
only when you invite us so to do. Amen.*

BOW DOWN AND WORSHIP ME

'Bow down and worship me' was the last of the three temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness. Unlike the temptations to turn stone to bread or leap from the Temple, which employ a subtle approach, this is a full-frontal assault. This is a temptation to put something in the place of God, to

replace a God who demands too much with an alternative that demands comparatively little but offers in return precisely what we desire. 'I'll give you the world if only you worship me.'

In many ways, all temptation is a temptation to idolatry, for it is the temptation to put something in God's rightful place. This temptation is especially attractive because it is not only a temptation to idolatry it's also a temptation to power. I will give you the world if you worship me.

Idolatry is based on transactional terms, simple to understand and to control. We perform certain services and in return receive certain benefits. Idolatry is attractive because we can control the terms of the transaction. Such transactional terms are perhaps sufficient when outlining a contract but they are insufficient and indeed inappropriate when dealing with personal relationships, which are far more complex, especially our relationship with God.

Modern day idols include money, fame, power, success, love, or even work. None of these are negative; in fact, precisely the opposite. This is what makes idolatry such a seductive form of temptation and provides justification for sacrificing vital human relationships on the altar of achievement. Bow down and worship me and I'll give you everything you ever wanted.... The temptation to power.

*Merciful God,
forgive us when we place too high a value
on the things we desire
and too low a value on the relationships
through which our humanity is both
experienced and expressed. Amen.*

10. Remember Not, Lord, Our Offences – Henry Purcell

11. Invitation to observe Lenten Discipline

This year more than any other in the living memory of most people, we have reason to remember that we are ash and to ash we shall return. Dust to dust. In the UK alone, over 110,000 people have now died from COVID 19 and we remember them. Countless thousands have been ill with the virus and recovered. Thousands of doctors, nurses, and care-workers have worked day and night to save lives and will suffer the consequences for years to come. We are already, and will for years, reap the consequences in damaged mental health and lives changed irreparably.

For most of the past year, I have tried to see the positives in this situation. To keep my spirits up and the spirit of the congregation. But today, on Ash Wednesday, when we are penitent, confess our sins, and reflect on our mortality, we take a moment to think of all those who have died, those who have cared for them, those who grieve for them, and all those for whom this pandemic has been devastating rather than simply a restricting annoyance.

12. Psalm 51: 1-17

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
O Lord, open my lips,

and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

13. Litany of Penitence (with imposition of ashes)

Let us pray

**Holy and merciful God,
we confess to you and to one another,
and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth,
that we have sinned by our own fault in thought, word and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.**

We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven.
Have mercy on us, O God.

We have not listened to your call to serve as Christ served us.
We have not been true to the mind of Christ.
We have grieved your Holy Spirit.
Have mercy on us, O God.

We confess to you, O God, all our past unfaithfulness:
the pride, hypocrisy and impatience in our lives,
we confess to you, O God.

Our anger at our own frustration
and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,
we confess to you, O God.

Our negligence in prayer and worship,
and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,
we confess to you, O God.

Accept our repentance, O God,
for the wrongs we have done.
For our neglect of human need and suffering
and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,
accept our repentance, O God.

For all false judgements,
for uncharitable thoughts towards our neighbours,
and for our prejudice and contempt
toward those who differ from us,
accept our repentance, O God.

For our waste and pollution of your creation
and our lack of concern for those who come after us,
accept our repentance, O God.

Restore us, O God,
and let your anger depart from us.
**Favourably hear us, O God,
for your mercy is great.**

Silence

Almighty God,
you create us from the dust of the earth.
Let these ashes be for us a sign of our repentance
and a symbol of our mortality.
May we always remember
that by your grace alone we are given eternal life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.
Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.

Silence

May almighty God have mercy on us,
forgive us our sins,
and keep us in life eternal. **Amen.**

14. Invitation to the Lord's Table – NYR

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Through your living Word you created all things,
The majesty of the heavens and the glory of the earth.
In your wisdom and goodness
you have made all people in your image and likeness.
Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all creation
We lift up our voices to proclaim the glory of your name.

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy and gracious God, we give you thanks and praise
that in the fullness of time you gave your only Son
to share our human nature and to be tempted
in every way as we are, yet without sin;
to set his face resolutely towards Jerusalem
and to be lifted high upon a cross,
that he might draw all creation to himself.

When the hour of his glory came, and loving his own to the end,
He sat with them at supper, took bread, and, after giving thanks to you, he broke
it and gave it to his disciples, saying,
'Take, eat. This is my body which is for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way he took the cup after supper, saying,
'Drink from this, all of you; this cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

Dying you destroyed our death,
rising you restored our life.
Lord Jesus, come in glory.

The Lord's Prayer

Sharing of Bread and wine

Post Communion Prayer

God of a love stronger than death,
you have given us new birth into a living hope
through the gift of your Son, God with us.
You have fed us with yourself
and strengthened us for the journey ahead.
God of truth and power, you take our weakness

and refashion us by grace.

As we begin our Lenten fast, we praise you that
because of Jesus' likeness to us
he was tested in every way
and that having endured and overcome temptation
he is able to help us in our times of trial
and to give us strength to take up the cross and follow him. **Amen**

15. STF Hymn # 287: When I survey

On which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ my God
All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to His blood

See from His head, His hands, His feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of Nature mine
That were an offering far too small
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all!

Isaac Watts 1674 – 1748

16. Blessing followed by Charge – NYR

This is the time of ashes and dust
when darkness clothes our dreams
and no star shines a guiding light.
Be the wings of our strength, O God
in this time of wilderness waiting.
May the example of Jesus' temptation give us hope,
And the guidance of the holy Spirit grant us peace. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Online Music taken from YouTube and iSingWorship – All rights reserved.
Some material included in this service is copyright: © 1999 Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes.
© United Reformed Church 2020 Common Worship, © Archbishop's Council 2006.