

Order of Worship for February 22, 2023 (Ash Wednesday)

Prelude:

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Ash Wednesday Address:

P: Dear brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, on this day the Church begins a holy season of prayerful and penitential reflection. Our attention is especially directed to the holy sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From ancient times the season of Lent has been kept as a time of special devotion, self-denial, and humble repentance born of a faithful heart that dwells confidently on His Word and draws from it life and hope.

Let us pray that our dear Father in heaven, for the sake of His beloved Son and in the power of His Holy Spirit, might richly bless this Lententide for us so that we may come to Easter with glad hearts and keep the feast in sincerity and truth.

P: For our sake God made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin,

C: so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

P: But He was wounded for our transgressions;

C: He: was crushed for our iniquities;

P: upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace,

C: and with His stripes we are healed.

Confession and Forgiveness:

P: Lord Jesus, search our hearts and minds that we may receive Your Word, share in Your Spirit, and be renewed in our relationships with You and with one another. We observe a moment of silence for personal prayers of confession.

P: With humble hearts, let us pray together:

C: Lord Jesus, the Father's only Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords, hear us as we pray.

P: You endured the dust and the ashes, the nails, and the spear. By Your suffering and death, You bore in Your body the punishment our deeds deserve.

C: Our rebellion against You in thought, word, and action is why You died for us—

P: to forgive our sins, to redeem our lives, and to cancel the debt we owe to God.

C: With hearts that are humble and lives ever grateful, help us to receive Your grace, bow before You in worship, and confess that You alone are Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

P: Almighty God our heavenly Father shows His mercy to us in the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who endured the “ashes” of Calvary’s cross so that we are given remission of all our sins, full and free. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

Hymn: “*O Lord, Throughout These Forty Days*” – **Hymn #418**

Imposition of Ashes: (*Those who desire to receive ashes come forward to where the pastors stand to receive an ash cross on their forehead or hand.*)

Hymn During Imposition: “*Lord Jesus, Think Me*” – **Hymn #610**

Responsive Prayer: (based on Isaiah 53)

P: Father, the Lenten season is once more upon us. It is time to pause, watch, reflect, confess.

C: It is time to be honest with ourselves and honest to God.

P: It is time to watch the Man of Sorrows, the One acquainted with grief.

C: For surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

P: But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;

C: Upon Him was the punishment that made us whole, and with His stripes we are healed.

P: All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way,

C: And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

P: He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth;

C: Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter—how like a lamb, the very lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

P: And like a sheep before its shearers is dumb,

C: so He opened not His mouth.

P: By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living.

C: stricken for the transgressions of My people.

P: And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death,

C: although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth.

P: That is why Lent begins on this Ash Wednesday, with ashes of repentance,

C: and with the hope of life out of the ashes.

P: With the Lord Jesus in His suffering, humiliation, agony, and bloody sweat;

C: and at a cross where He took our sins upon Himself.

P: That great exchange—God’s mercy and forgiveness purchased at the cost of His own Son!

C: For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Amen.

Hymn of Praise: “*Glory Be to Jesus*” - **Hymn #433**

The Old Testament Reading: Joel 2:12-19

R: “Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;

and He relents over disaster. 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; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber. Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep and say, "Spare Your people, O Lord, and make not Your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'" Then the Lord became jealous for His land and had pity on His people. The Lord answered and said to His people, "Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.

R: This is the Word of our Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

The Epistle Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

R: Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with Him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

R: This is the Word of our Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 6th chapter

C: Glory be to You, O Lord.

P: [Jesus said] "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will

reward you. ... “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face that your fasting may not be seen by others, but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

P: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

C: Praise be to You, O Christ.

Sermon Hymn: “*O Mighty Cross*” (on screen)

Sermon: “*The Means Justifies the End*” - **2 Corinthians 5:21**

Kate is an FBI agent involved with suspected kidnapping in Arizona. She and other agents have been conducting surveillance on a big house in the desert where many people go in and few come out. They break in and get into a shootout with criminals, but find no sign of a kidnapping. But the bullet holes from the firefight help to reveal what is in the walls of the house—bodies wrapped in plastic. Bodies of those caught in the fighting between drug lords. Meanwhile police outside the house go through a shed looking for drugs. Then a bomb goes off from under the shed killing many agents. The FBI agent is horrified.

She is then recruited to go over from Texas into Mexico to go after the drug cartels. She meets Matt, the agent in charge who is very casual wearing a loose shirt, sandals, and sunglasses, and a mysterious figure named Alejandro. The agents go into Mexico; then as they are on the bridge driving back into the United States, they notice two cars with suspicious looking young men in them. The agents get out of their SUVs and surround the cars, but Kate stays inside. She wonders what they are doing. The agents urge the men inside to not shoot. But they do and end up being efficiently slaughtered by the agents. Kate is totally shocked as they drive off leaving behind the carnage. When someone expresses concern about the bad publicity, another agent responds, “It won’t even make the news in El Paso.”

Kate continues to be caught up in all the bad things the other agents do. She learns from Matt that they are CIA agents who have fought terrorists and are now empowered to carry on a war with the cartels. They are sowing violence among the drug traffickers to create chaos, to have the cartels knock each other off. Alejandro is a hitman himself who works or whoever will help him kill his enemies. Kate is part of the group because as an FBI agent she has domestic authority to act within the US borders that the CIA agents don’t have. Kate ends up confronting Alejandro, who has killed in cold blood a drug trafficker. He shoots her in her bullet-proof vest to disarm her and tells her never to point a gun at him. In the end Alejandro gently tells Kate that the war on drugs is a world of wolves, and she, as a decent person, is no wolf.

Some of you may recognize that the story is the plot to the movie, “Sicario.” “Sicario” are the gunmen for the cartels who seem to have no choice but to obey the orders of the drug

lords. The name “Sicario” comes from the “sicarii,” a group of Jewish zealots who at the time of Jesus were assassins who wanted to kill Roman officials and any who dealt with them. As critics have reviewed the movie, they talk about the fine line between good and evil. In fact one commentator mentioned that Kate, the agent who wants to be ethical and law-abiding, can be the real villain in the story because her standards stand in the way of accomplishing anything. Matt and Alejandro may not follow all the rules, but they are effective. It is the classic idea of “the end justifies the means.”

Does it? It sure doesn’t seem that way in the world we were taught to know as children. There is good, and there is bad. It is black and white. But we grow up into a different world. The movie-makers of “Sicario” use desert tones, lots of beiges to emphasize that in the world of the drug wars, it is not black and white. The “Sicario” killers come from poor families who struggle to survive and end up being trapped in the life they live because their only way out is being killed by the drug lords. Alejandro is so hateful because his wife’s head was chopped off and his daughter was thrown in a pool of acid.

So does the end justify the means? Is it okay to live together before marriage because we can “test out” a relationship before getting caught up in something permanent? Is it okay to “fudge” on a lab report to get a passing grade? Is it okay to waste resources because the little we personally use is just a drop in the bucket? Is it okay to just keep quiet when someone does wrong because it will keep the peace? Adam and Eve ate from the tree because the fruit looked “good.” But did that end justify the means, ignoring God’s commands?

In a very different movie, “A Man for All Seasons,” the main character is Sir Thomas Moore, an important leader in England at the time of King Henry VIII. Moore is in trouble because he refuses to sign the petition that would make Henry head of the church in England so he can divorce his wife and marry Anne Boleyn. A man named Richard Rich has approached Moore asking for a job as a lawyer, but Moore only offers him a teaching job because he knows Rich will easily be corrupted by bribery. Rich comes to Moore’s house begging for a job in the courts, but again Moore turns him down. Moore’s wife, daughter, and son-in-law witness this and urge him to have Rich arrested. Moore refuses because the man has not broken the law. They reply, “But he’s dangerous. The son-in-law says it would not be wrong to break the law to stop the devil. Moore replies, “And when the devil corners me and I need the law to protect me, and it’s not there, what do I do?” Later Moore is sentenced to death because of Rich’s perjury.

It didn’t seem like holding the means helped Moore in the end. But as he is confronted by officials to sign the petition, a friend tells him, “Thomas, just sign it for fellowship.” Moore replies, “And when you die and head to heaven and I head to hell for this will you join me in hell for fellowship?” Moore may have been executed for not letting the end justify the means, but he died knowing he was in arms of his loving Savior.

The end does not justify the means. That is why both abortion and apartheid are wrong. How can we get out of the evil that entangles our world unless we take matters into our own

hands and do whatever to stop it? It is a vicious cycle. Our efforts to eliminate evil become evil themselves. As Isaiah said so profoundly, “All our righteous deeds are like a filthy rag.”

But God took that very evil and used it to destroy evil. He did it by making Himself the victim of evil. Paul says, “For our sake God the Father made His Son to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” There was no greater evil than the suffering and death of Jesus. As sad as it is when soldiers die in battle, it is much worse when little children are killed. Why? Because we see them as defenseless and innocent. Jesus was the height of that as He allowed Himself to be defenseless and as He is the only truly innocent person who has ever lived. But in that greatest evil comes the greatest good. Jesus became sin; He became the recipient of all the punishment we deserve so that we can be freed from evil. In Him the means, His suffering and death, justify the end-our restoration to God.

That is the same “means” that can justify the end of whatever we do. On our own no matter what we do will eventually fail because our “means” is apart from God. Even the seemingly best things we do are done to make us feel better, to make us think we are better than other people, or to make us believe that others will give us something in return. The best we can do is essentially selfish; it condemns us. But as we trust in what Jesus has done for us, then all we do in response to what Jesus did is right with God.

This Lent we journey again with Jesus to His suffering and death on the cross. We see Him tortured for our sake. We see Him brutalized for us. And we see Him rise on Easter. That is the means that always and in the end justifies you and me.

Apostle’s Creed: (back cover of hymnal)

Offering-Voluntary:

The Prayers for Ash Wednesday:

P: God the Father, in heaven

C: have mercy.

P: God the Son, Redeemer of the world,

C: have mercy

P: God the Holy Spirit,

C: have mercy.

P: Be gracious to us.

C: Spare us, good Lord.

P: Be gracious to us.

C: Help us, good Lord.

P: By the mystery of your conception in the Virgin Mary by Your holy birth; by Your baptism, fasting, and temptation; by Your agony and bloody sweat; by Your cross and suffering; by Your precious death and burial;
by Your glorious resurrection and ascension; and by the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost:

C: Help us, good Lord.

P: In all time when things are going bad; in all time when things are okay; in the hour of death; and on the last day when we stand before You in judgment:

C: help us, good Lord.

P: We poor sinners implore You

C: to hear us, O Lord.

P: To prosper the preaching of Your Word; to bless our prayer and meditation; to strengthen and preserve us in the true faith; to give heart to our sorrow and strength to our repentance:

C: We implore You to hear us, good Lord.

P: To draw all to yourself; to bless those who are instructed in the faith; to watch over and console the poor, the sick, the distressed, the lonely, the forsaken, the abandoned, and all who stand in need of prayer; to give abundant blessing to all works of mercy; and to have mercy on us all;

C: We implore You to hear us, good Lord.

P: To turn our hearts to You; to turn the hearts of our enemies, persecutors, slanderers; and graciously to hear our prayers:

C: We implore You to hear us, good Lord.

P: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,

C: We implore You to hear us.

P: Christ the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin of the world,

C: have mercy.

P: Christ the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin of the world,

C: have mercy.

P: Christ the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin of the world,

C: grant us Your peace.

P: O Christ,

C: hear us.

P: O Lord,

C: have mercy.

P: O Christ,

C: have mercy.

ALL: O Lord, have mercy. Amen

The Words of Our Lord:

Lord's Prayer:

Distribution of Holy Communion:

Hymns: "Lamb of God" – Hymn #550

"Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain" – Hymn #435

Hymn After Communion: "O Jesus, Blessed Lord, to Thee" – Hymn #632

Prayer after Communion:

P: Almighty and ever-living God, You have made and You forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and honest hearts, so that, truly repentant of our sins, we may obtain from You, the God of all mercy, full pardon and forgiveness; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and rules with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Blessing: (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: *“Jesus, Refuge of the Weary”* - **Hymn #423**

Postlude: