

# Season of LENT

## Prayers

O Lord, our heavenly Father, You desire not the death of a sinner, but rather that we would turn from our evil ways and live. Turn us again, O God of our salvation. Let Your anger cease from us. Spare us from every evil to body and soul. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

## Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, You despise nothing You have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and contrite hearts that lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness we may receive from You full pardon and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

## Scripture Readings

Psalms 51:1-13 (14-19)  
(antiphon v. 17)

Joel 2:12-19

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

## Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 607

Other Hymns – 419 (OT), 615 (OT), 915 (OT), 563 (E), 418, 421, 610, 613

In mercy look upon Your Church, and preserve the Gospel among us. Renew us in this penitential season to strive against the desires of the flesh, to grow in the joy of Your salvation, and to look in love and service toward our neighbours, especially those of the household of faith.

Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Preserve Your Word, O Lord, against error, and preserve among us the preaching of Your Word, that we may be nurtured in faith, discern truth from falsehood, and remain steadfast in Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Open our hearts to the preaching of Your Word, that through daily repentance we may be kept in the promise of our Baptism and in the new life born of water and the Spirit. Bless those preparing for Baptism and the catechumens being instructed in Your Word. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Look with favour on the families of our congregation. Defend Your holy estate of marriage against every enemy that would divide. Strengthen parents for their duties, especially bringing up their children in the fear and instruction of the Lord, and preserve us all faithful to the end. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Look graciously on our nation and its leaders, all civil servants, and those who protect us and work for the common good. Drive away all disease and fear from us. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Behold in mercy all who are sick, who suffer and who rejoice; and be with all expectant mothers, all whose labor is dangerous, the unemployed, those near death and those who mourn. Give comfort to us, who are dust and must return to dust, that a broken and contrite heart You will not despise. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Graciously receive our prayers, deliver and preserve us, for to You alone we give all glory, honour and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



# LENTEN SERMON

ASH WEDNESDAY  
FEBRUARY 17 2021

**Sermon Text: Matthew 6:1-6; 16-21**

*“X’ Marks The Spot”*

Let’s be honest. For most, if not all of us, our problem isn’t that we give to the needy in order to be seen and praised by others, or pray on street corners in order to be seen and praised by others, or fast in order to be seen and praised by others. No, our problem is that we don’t do these things at all . . . or not nearly as often as we should.

Our prayer life is not what it should be. And how many times do we walk by people in need and not only fail to help them, but think ill of them . . . that they are scammers, or lazy, or just out to get some free cash? And fasting? Far more likely is that our bodily urges and desires master us rather than we master them . . . whether that urge be for food or sex or what have you.

And those are just three examples. Open up the secret places of your heart and what will you find there? A heart that fears, loves, and trusts in God above all things? That treasures God’s name and His Word above all else? That honours and obeys father and mother and respects our earthly authorities? That does not hurt others, but helps them in every physical need? That is sexually pure? That is generous and truthful? That is content with what you have? That thinks of others and not yourself? That’s not your heart at all, is it? And if your Father who sees in secret will reward you, what do you think you deserve for what is really in your heart?

Well, “X marks the spot. You’ve been marked . . . even if you didn’t receive ashes tonight. You’re the sinner. So the Scriptures clearly state: “You are dust, and to dust shall return . . . “The wages of sin is death.”

The prophet Joel is right – “rend your hearts and not your garments.” Throw

open the doors of your heart wherein hides all that sin, all that junk, all that impurity, and repent. “Return to the Lord, your God.” And why? Well, as he goes on to say: “For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”

Think about those attributes for a moment. For this is not just who God is for those who are good; after all, as the Scriptures remind us: “There is no one who is good; no, not ever one.” No, this is who God is for you, and for all people . . . yes, for sinners. God is gracious; that is, He gives us what we do not deserve . . . life and breath and all we need to support this body and life. He is merciful; in other words, He does not give us what we do deserve . . . He does not withdraw His love and care from us and let us go our own way, but disciplines us and helps us, oftentimes in ways of which we are not even aware. He is slow to anger; that is patient, longsuffering . . . He does not strike out at us or snap at us as we so often do to others who wrong us, or who we perceive have wronged us. He wants no sinner to perish. He wants all to return to Him. He is abounding in steadfast love . . . a love that does not wax and wane, but is steadfast and reliable, that is not just a little thing now and then but abounds, overflows.

And yet, that is the God we have rebelled against and turned away from with our sinful lives, thinking we know better, thinking we can do better. And that is what sin really is – thinking that God’s way is not good, is not right, is not best; and that we know and can do better. That’s what the sin in us thinks . . . and what a mess we have made as a result.

But this gracious and merciful and loving God that we have rebelled against and turned away from is also the God who calls us back . . . calls us to return to Him. And He does so and will do so over and over until the Last Day when He comes again to issue His righteous and final judgment upon sinners.

But that day, however, has not yet come. And that’s good news; for as St. Paul says in the Epistle Reading from 2 Corinthians: “God is making His appeal through us. Be reconciled to God. Now is the favourable time; now is the day of salvation.” Yes, now . . . today!

And once again, “X” marks the spot. For the “X” on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday marking us as sinners is not just any “X” – it is in the shape of a cross. And the cross of Jesus, God’s true and only Son, is what makes all the difference. For there on the cross is your reconciliation with God. There on the cross is your salvation. There, “X” marks the spot where Jesus, “who knew no sin, was made to

be sin” . . . made to be the one and only sacrifice and offering for sin . . . so that you who have no righteousness of your own, “might become the righteousness of God.” There on the cross is where Jesus shows the grace, the mercy, the steadfast love of God for you . . . to save you . . . to rescue you . . . to give you life and hope and a glorious eternal future.

And so, this Ash Wednesday we turn back to God, not with Joel’s hopeful but uncertain “who knows whether God will not turn and relent;” but in humble repentance and assurance and confidence that there on the cross of His own Son God has turned to us, that our many sins have been completely and fully paid for by His holy, precious blood . . . that, as St. Paul declares: “For our sake God made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

“Return to the Lord, your God.” Which means, go back to where you’ve been before, to that place where “X” marks the spot . . . the spot “where your treasure is,” the spot where God’s grace and mercy is given to sinners – that is, to the baptism font where He first placed that “X”, that sign of the cross, ‘on your forehead and on your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified’; to His absolution where He forgives Your sins ‘for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of His beloved Son’; to the table where He invites you to eat and to drink of His very body and blood ‘given into death and shed for the forgiveness of your sins.’

And as you, a sinner, return to the Lord your God on this Ash Wednesday, to that place where “X” marks the spot; may you do so with this prayer in your heart and on your lips: ‘On my heart imprint Your image, Blessed Jesus, King of grace, That life’s riches, cares, and pleasures Never may Your work erase; Let the clear inscription be: Jesus, crucified for me, Is my life, my hope’s foundation, And my glory and salvation’ (LSB 422). Amen.