

Highlands United Methodist Church

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Senior Pastor
Associate Pastor
Accompanist

Rev. Dr. Betty Bradford
Rev. Kerry Greenhill
Judy Hagerman

Ash Wednesday
February 17, 2010

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Thought for Meditation

If we picture all the obstructions between us and God as a wilderness, Lent presents us with time to clear and cultivate a part of that wilderness, to create an open space in it.

- Sarah Parsons,
A Clearing Season: Reflections for Lent

Welcome

Music for Reflection

Judy Hagerman, *violin*

Unison Prayer

Loving Lord of life, as we journey through this holy season of Lent, may we be guided by your grace. Give us the courage and wisdom to clear away the obstacles that keep us from right relationship with you. Open our eyes to see your path clearly and then set our hands and hearts to the task of making room for Christ to enter in. Amen.

Hymn "Give Me a Clean Heart" No. 2133 TFWS

Scripture Reading Psalm 51 1:17

Reflection "A Clearing Season"

Prayer of Confession (Unison)

God of mercy, our hearts are troubled and our minds are in confusion. We have separated ourselves from your peace by attempting to shape our own path in the forest of life. But we have found that path to be lonely. We have stumbled and fallen and with humility we cry to you. Hear us once again. Forgive us our self-reliance. Forgive us. Thank you God for allowing us yet another season of clearing that we may walk the true path where the light is good and the friendship is warm. By your grace our guide awaits us. With Christ by our side, we remember our lonely path and we rejoice in your mercy. Amen.

Words of Assurance

In our striving to follow Christ, God is a sure and constant presence, never coercing commitment but always inviting it. God holds before us priorities that emerge from the Word, God enlightens us when our understandings are dim, God beckons us to embody belief in deed, God strengthens us in spirit and truth. It is so that we are loved by God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Hymn "Kyrie" No. 2275 TFWS

Communion

Poem "Ash Wednesday"
by Kerry Greenhill

Time for Reflection

Everyone is invited to reflect upon what needs to be cleared from your life that may open the path to God. If you wish, you may place the paper in the urn. Our prayers will then be burned and the ashes used for the imposition of ashes.

Imposition of Ashes

Unison Prayer

Gracious God, you have given us your light and truth to guide us through confusion. You offer to share our burdens and give us your strength, yet we trust in our own efforts and find ourselves exhausted. During this season of reflection, bring us back into your presence, overcome our separation from one another and from you. By your Word and Spirit, fill us with the gifts that equip us to meet life's demands, that we may be your people in the world and live in the confidence and joy of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Hymn "Blessed Quietness" No. 2142 TFWS

Benediction

Ash Wednesday 2010
The Clearing Season
Rev. Dr. Betty Bradford

I went to the hairdresser this week and the wonderful woman who cuts my hair is from Iran. She asked me about Lent. She said to me “that is time when you don’t eat meat...right?” We talked about some of the understandings of Lent, the history and how many see Lent today. Lent, I read recently, is an opportunity to invite God into a quiet space, by giving ourselves permission to “make a way in the wilderness.” Lent may serve as a season for clearing a path. Clearing a path in our lives, we become freer and more willing to explore areas where we might not be satisfied. With God’s help, we can live through our temptations—our “wild beasts.”

The 40 days of Lent can be our clearing season. Imagine Jesus walking into the wilderness to clear away all the temptations that could come between him and God...between him and God’s call for his life. Jesus went soul searching. Lent is about giving up things, about penitence and looking at our misdeeds, but when we look at Jesus preparing for his ministry, he went into the desert seeking introspection. Jesus wanted to know himself so he might come closer to God. This is our journey also.

If we are willing to look at our lives more closely, not to criticize, but to identify the obstructions that keep us from God, our soul searching can bring us in right relationship with God.

When we read the story of Jesus in the desert, it says that the Spirit drove him into the desert. Aren’t there are many moments in our lives when it feels like the Spirit has driven us into the desert as well, forcing us to come face to face with ourselves. We find ourselves in a place where self-scrutinizing must take place...or should I say should take place. The clearing season can be a fruitful time of self-realization, but not for the purpose of sitting too long with the guilt and shame of our misdeeds, which would go against the gospel. This self-scrutiny is for the purpose of clearing away those things that have a hold on us and that dim the light of Christ in our lives. To examine everything that keeps us from the message of new life and forgiveness that was and is Christ’s message.

- What are the parts of your life that are shrouded in darkness?
- Can you name some part of your life that does not flourish?

Each year our Lenten journey has a focus. This year our Lenten journey is dedicated to the hope that the barriers between us and God can be cleared away, that we might experience greater joy and newness of life. We hope to transform the wilderness into our home, our garden. We commit ourselves to our own growth with the hope that clearing away obstacles, barrier and temptations will help us serve Christ in the world. May your 40 days, your clearing season, your soul searching, open your life to the transforming light of Christ who is our shepherd and our guide in the wilderness. Amen.

Thoughts from *A Clearing Season: Reflections for Lent* by Sarah Parsons

Ash Wednesday

bend the knee
bow the heart
let dust and ashes leave their mark
the sign of cross
and grave and tomb
the earth we come from stakes its claim
we sing
we pray
we confess
we speak truth in the face of self-delusion
we sing mercy, Lord,
have mercy
we bend the knee
we turn around¹
and face to face
we see each other
also marked
by life in death
also claimed
by cross and flame
also humbled
also loved
also seeking
also forgiven
and we remember
we remember
we remember
whose we are
and where we shall return
and in the midst of grieving
we give thanks.

by Kerry Greenhill, 2007

¹ The root of the word “repent” means “turn around.”