

† St. Martin United Church of Christ †

March 1, 2017 7:00PM

Ash Wednesday Lenten Service

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\*All those who are able, please stand at asterisk.

**Prior to worship, each person receives a river stone along with the Order of Service. Our service tonight begins the Season of Lent, the forty days leading up to Easter.**

**Lent comes from the Anglo Saxon word *lencten*, which means “spring.” The forty days represent the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his ministry. Today, Christians often use this time to focus on their relationship with God, often, choosing to give up something or to volunteer and give of themselves for others.**

**Prelude**

**Call to Worship (responsively)**

**Leader:** Creator God, still center of the world you have made, we come to you in this season of turning and returning.

**People: O Lord, we need your mercy and grace!**

**Leader:** We do not know how to seek you with our whole hearts, but we know you are our source and our destiny.

**People: O Lord, we need your mercy and grace!**

**Leader:** In the midst of life, we return to you, we turn toward you.

**People: O Lord, we need your mercy and grace!**

**Leader:** We thank you that you receive even the broken heart, the troubled conscience, the conflicted spirit.

**People: Seeking you in secret, may we turn around to honor you with our whole heart, seeing and seeking a whole humanity; through Jesus Christ, our path homeward to you. Amen.**

**Opening Hymn: “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” #261**

**Holy Scripture Ezekiel 11:19-20 Matthew 6:1-6**

**Homily “The Heart of the Matter”**

## Prayer For the Burning of Palms

**God of our hearts, not of our outer garments, nor our church structures, nor our programs and human plans, you are the only one who can make us pure. You are the only one who can wash us clean of all our sin and guilt. You alone can save us. You are the merciful and just God. If we turn, we see you. Help us to turn, O God of all hearts, and find you here with us: Emmanuel—the Christ-heart within us all. We light our fires for you, to reflect your shining.**

### Burning of the Palms

#### Confession Of Sin

**Leader:** Eternal and merciful God, your flame burns within the dust of our lives, animating and vitalizing all that we are.

**People:** **The fire of your loving presence becomes our very breath.**

**Leader:** But we have not loved you as you have loved us, nor have we lived as we ought, and our years are soon gone.

**People:** **Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.**

**Leader:** God have mercy upon us. Lift us above the ashes of every past regret and present failure; reveal to us our true selves; and give us grace to accept your mercy and courage to live by your promise.

**People:** **Return us to the heart of the matter. Return us to your great heart. May our hearts beat more and more like yours. Lord, who takes away the sin of the world, grant us peace. Amen.**

#### Assurance of Pardon

For the heart of the matter is that we can find our truest selves beating within the very Heart of God. Here we are forgiven and set free of our burdens and sin. Praise God who frees us and lights up our hearts with the fire of *agape*—love.

#### Breaking the Bread

**The bread we break is the communion of the body of Christ.**

#### Pouring the Cup

**This cup is the communion of the blood of Christ**

**Invitation to Imposition of Ashes and Receiving of Communion**

You are invited to bring the “stone of your heart” and place it on the altar. Give it up as a Lenten gesture. As you receive the ashes, pray that God will soften and open up all the hard places of your heart. As you receive the Bread and Cup, know that your heart is held and nurtured by the very hand of God. May your heart come alive in Christ. The gifts of God for the people of God!

We entrust God with our hearts.

We receive the ashes.

We receive the bread and the cup.

**Departing Hymn “Sweet Hour of Prayer”**

**Benediction**

Leader: So, you have come tonight to acknowledge Jesus and his life and death. While you wear the symbol of ashes, know in your hearts that this is not all there is. “Ashes to ashes and dust to dust” is the stuff of our little lives. But the large heart of the matter is that we are rooted in God’s very love, a God who is afoot in our hearts and in our world. Go forth in God’s faith, hope, and love. Gather your true purpose about you!

People: **Amen.**

**Postlude**

**Thank you for worshipping with us!**