

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth**  
**Wednesday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025**  
**Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**Ash Wednesday**  
**Joel 2:1-2 & 12-14**

**Welcome**

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season in the church year known as Lent.

Lent is a time to prepare for the celebration of Easter and to renew our life in the mystery of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance, and for the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We begin our journey to Easter with the sign of ashes, a biblical symbol of mourning and penitence.

This ancient sign speaks of the fragility of human life, and marks the penitence of the community of faith.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of Christ,  
to observe a holy Lent  
by self-examination and penitence,  
by prayer and fasting,  
by works of love,  
and by reading and meditating on the Word of God.

**Announcements**

**Call to Worship**

*O Lord, open my lips,*  
**and my mouth will declare your praise.**

*You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;*  
**you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.**

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart,  
O God, you will not despise. Amen.*

### **Prayer of Adoration**

God of mercy and mystery,  
You are Light of true light and Truth of deepest truth.  
We find peace in your perfection and courage in your strength;  
we find wisdom in your truth and hope is your steadfast love.  
You are our beginning and our end,  
the first and the last,  
the forgiver and redeemer of all things.  
We worship you now,  
Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit,  
Creator, Redeemer, and Guide,  
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

### **Opening Hymn**

### **Call to Confession**

Genuine repentance involves two things:  
the dying-away of the old self and the coming-to-life of the new.  
The dying-away of the old self is to be genuinely sorry for sin,  
to hate it more and more, and to run away from it.  
The coming-to-life of the new self  
is wholehearted joy in God through Christ  
and a delight to do every kind of good as God wants us to.  
Together, as Christ's body, we now confess our sin  
and express our longing to live in joyful obedience to God.

### **Prayer of Confession**

Creator God, you fashioned us out of dust,  
breathing your Spirit into us,  
so we might sing your praise.

**But we have denounced your gift of life**

**in order to be our own gods,  
clinging to death-dealing idols of our own making.**

**We have denied our creaturely status,  
seeking to lord it over those we label “less-than.”**

**We squelch all who are different  
through ignoring, belittling, murdering, and bombing.**

**We believe survival-of-the-fittest lies,  
discounting the weak,  
and profiting by others’ pain.**

Not trusting in your providence,  
we stop our ears to cries of those in need  
because we’re afraid we won’t have enough.

**We have been unfaithful stewards, O Lord.**

**We live in a state of sin among a people of sin.**

**Save for your grace, we perish.**

**Remember our making, Creator God;  
remember we are dust.**

**Have mercy on us according to your loving kindness.  
Breathe new life into us once more,  
so we might be the people you created us to be.  
Restore unto us the joy of your salvation  
that we might do justice, love kindness,  
and walk humbly with the Lord Jesus Christ,  
in whose name we pray,  
Amen.**

### **Prayer for illumination**

Lord, of life, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us that as we hear these words they may becoming living Word for us to the glory of our living Lord Jesus Christ we pray.  
**Amen.**

## **Scripture**

### **Joel 2:1-2**

**2 Blow a trumpet in Zion;  
 sound an alarm on my holy mountain!  
 Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,  
 for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near,  
<sup>2</sup> a day of darkness and gloom,  
 a day of clouds and thick darkness!  
 Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains  
 a great and powerful people;  
 their like has never been before,  
 nor will be again after them  
 through the years of all generations.**

### **Joel 2:12-14**

<sup>12</sup> **“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,  
 “return to me with all your heart,  
 with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
<sup>13</sup> 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.**  
<sup>14</sup> **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?**

## **Sermon**

### **Ecclesiastes 3:20**

<sup>20</sup> **All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return**

These are the words that will echo in church sanctuaries around the globe today. They will be spoken at different times and in different languages, but they will be spoken faithfully as a solemn reminder for all of God’s people of the beginning of the season of Lent.

A solemn reminder of our walk through the wilderness with Jesus Christ as he prepares to make the ultimate sacrifice for his faithful upon the cross at Calvary.

Ash Wednesday calls for us to go deeper than our normal weekly call to confession. It calls for us to consider who we are. And to stand before God honestly, with all of our faults, blemishes and sins exposed.

We come before our God both as individuals and corporately, repentant of all we have done which we should not have, and repentant of all we should have done and did not. And to pray that God would give us the strength to be better.

It is unclear when exactly the prophet Joel was delivering the message of repentance to the people of God, some scholars believe it was roughly 835 BC and others argue that was closer to 450 BC. However, the style of writing is similar to the prophets Hosea and Amos which would lend support to the 835 BC estimation. Not much is known of the prophet, except for the words which are recorded in the Old Testament.

In truth the message of the prophet Joel is timeless, it could just as easily be applied in 835BC and 450BC, as 2025AD. And although he is called a minor prophet it is only because of the length of the book, in fact his message is of utmost importance to the faithful of all times.

In the Scripture we read today, Joel is calling for the people of God to lament, to repent from their sinful way of life and pray for deliverance from their wicked deeds. Joel does not hesitate to remind them of the impending judgement of God which every living human will face.

However, he does not just warn people with the doom and gloom prophecy of the day of Judgement. He also speaks of the hope we have for salvation because of the grace and mercy of the Lord our God.

Do you notice how it is call for us to rend our hearts?

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**Return to the Lord your God,  
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and leave a blessing behind him,  
a grain offering and a drink offering  
for the Lord your God?**

As we read through the Old Testament, we find many instances of people rending their clothing, wearing sackcloth, and casting ashes upon their heads as signs of repentance and mourning. However, Joel is saying that God is looking for more than just external indicators of our repentance.

Joel is telling the people of God that they need to be changed at the very core of their being. Showing repentance through worldly actions is one thing, but truly understanding the nature of your sin, and the severity of your ways, that is what calls you to a deep heartfelt repentance, one that makes you ache with grief as you repent and turn away from the sins for which Jesus Christ died upon that cross at Calvary for you.

This was a powerful message to the faithful in Joel's day and it is still just as powerful today. We need to acknowledge our personal sins, even the ones we enjoy, we need to understand that temptations and our willingness to entertain them in our lives can cause real significant issues in our life, in our relationships with others and in our relationship with God.

Sometimes our most common form of sin, is our refusal to acknowledge the truth of God's Word and deny our sin and deflect attention from our own nature and cast the focus on others whose sins are more publicly condemned.

In the world today, this message of Joel needs to be shared with all, because we live in a world where the condemnation of others to cover up our own sin and faults has become common practice.

We live in a world where we see words, deeds and situations twisted, often exaggerated, or edited, or sometimes even fabricated, all with the purpose of causing a reaction in the masses. Years and years ago this did not work, when something happened halfway across the country, we often found out about it days later, after the storm had been weathered and cooler heads had prevailed with the facts and the truth about what had been said or what had occurred.

Today, things have changed. Many people that share information, including the modern media and its more traditional counterparts, are more concerned with an instant reaction and the revenue generated by attention and advertising than ensuring the truth is being shared.

In our day, we have people jumping on the sides of an argument before the facts have even begun to trickle in and everyone weighing in with their opinion and insults for those who disagree with them.

Today, people are often condemned by the world on Facebook, X and other social media platforms before any of the facts have become known. In many cases they are condemned because of something being taken out of context or because of something that has been fabricated completely. And often there is no follow up or apology, just a small acknowledgement of error for legal purposes.

Imagine if this form of band wagoning had been commonplace in Jesus's day. Jesus could have been cancelled by the culture before his ministry even began because he went against those who were in power politically, culturally, socially and religiously.

Today, we happily condemn others for things which we perceive that they have done wrong.

When the Scribes and Pharisees confronted Jesus about the woman accused of committing adultery, they ask him who should cast the first stone. In today's world they whole world is casting stones before the words can even leave the lips of the Pharisees.

Perhaps Jesus's instruction to let he who is without sin cast the first stone should be modernized to let he who is without sin, speak in haste or hit the enter key first. If all Christians would hold the teachings of God a little closer to their hearts, they might find themselves being less reactionary and more reflective, not only on the words and deeds of others, but also on their own words and deeds.

And ultimately that is what Joel is reminding us of, that before we go casting stones at others for their sinful nature, we need to spend some time in serious reflection and confession about our own sinful nature.

The truth is that it is much easier to look at the words and deeds of others and condemn them, than to look honestly into our own hearts and recognize and reflect upon the things in our life that are sinful and hurt our relationship with others and with God.

This is why Joel tells us to rend our hearts, when we are honest with ourselves and honest before God it hurts, it fills us with shame and grief, sorrow at our sin. We need to understand the depths of our sin so that we are willing to come to God humbly, honestly confess our sins against him and seek his forgiveness, and then with the help of the Holy Spirit turn away from that sin.

This is why the Lenten season is so critical for modern Christians. We live in a world where sin and focus on self are so commonplace that even the concept of recognizing our sins and admitting them to ourselves is unheard of.

Lent is a time when Christians are meant to be separated from the world, a time when we actively and attentively change our focus.

Many people have made Lent superficial and treat it as a season of self-denial, giving up something simple from their lives, like coffee, chocolate, or some other simple pleasure. They rend their clothing essentially.

Lent is meant to rend the heart; our self-denial should serve a purpose it should change us. So, as we give something up in our life it should be replaced by something that will change us, like prayer, reading of the Scriptures or serving God's Kingdom in a new way.

The focus of Lent is not self-denial but developing our relationship with God. We should be examining our lives and working at being better Christians, demonstrating the love of God to ourselves in our thoughts and to the world around us through our words and deeds. Which will give us a better relationship with God and act as a beacon of light for the lost in this world.

So, remember thou are dust, and to dust thou shalt return.

Reflect upon your life, your thoughts, your words, and your deeds. Know that God is aware of every aspect of your life and stand before him as yourself, acknowledge the truth of your sin before God the Father, and ask him to help you to live according to his Word.

Ash Wednesday is about understanding the nature of our sin, the severity of our ways, and undergoing a deep heartfelt repentance, not the simple giving up of things that please us, but one that makes us ache with grief as we rend our hearts and leave our old self behind, as we turn away from the sins in our life for Jesus Christ, our Saviour who died upon that cross at Calvary and paid the debt we owed.

Today, we begin our Lenten journey of change.

Let us pray.

O God,  
you do not desire the death of sinners,  
but you want them to turn to you and live.  
Look with pity on the weakness of our mortal nature.  
We confess that we are but ashes,  
and for our wickedness we deserve to return to the dust.  
Forgive all our sins,  
and give us the blessings that come with true repentance;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**



**Source: Freely modified from Mozarabic Collects, ed. Rev. Chas. R. Hale, New York, 1881, p. 22 #1**

### **Imposition of Ashes**

Beloved people of God, every year at the time of the Christian Passover we celebrate our redemption through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Ground of Being.

Lent is a season to prepare for this celebration and to renew our life together in the mystery of a crucified and risen, living Lord. We begin this season by acknowledging our need for repentance and for the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We will continue our journey to Easter with the sign of ashes. Tonight, you will be marked with ash and in the sign of a cross. You will hear the words from Scripture, "From dust you came." To dust you shall return. Be at peace." This ancient sign and ritual speaks of the frailty and uncertainty of human life, the truth of our impermanence and the need for Christ's love and light. The sign with which we are marked reveals our desire to live repentant lives, individually and as the gathered beloved community, and our hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the name of Christ, we are invited to observe a holy Lent by self-examination and self-emptying love with practices of prayer and fasting; with works of loving kindness and mercy; and by meditating on God's good Word, ancient and new.

Before Christ, let us confess our sin, how it is with our life, and our lives together:

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, you are one who guards and guides our way.  
**Have mercy upon us.**

To follow you is to trust you in paradox;  
that from a broken, aching heart,  
**risers a healing and hopeful heart.**

that out of weakness and vulnerability,  
**grows the quickening of Christ's Love.**

that in darkness and despair,  
**the radiance of Christ's Light shines.**

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, we fail to follow you; we turn away.

**Forgive us, we pray.**

As certain as the morning sun that rises, you are here, Lord.

**Forgive us, we pray.**

This day. This Evening.

**There was evening, then morning, the first day. And it was good. Very good.**

This day. This Evening. Ashes to Ashes. Dust to Dust.

**We are grounded in the Source of All Being. This day. This Evening.**

For needing evidence for every holy matter, and wanting none for our indifference to all injustice,

**Forgive and accept our repentance.**

For failure to speak and praise your name alone and that we do not make a defense for the hope that is within us,

**Forgive and accept our repentance.**

Restore us, O God.

**Favorably hear us, for your mercy and forgiveness are great. Amen.**

From dust we came, to dust we shall return; and even yet, we sing “Alleluia” at the grave because death is not the end, only a sign of an impending resurrection. May these ashes tonight be for us a sign of our mortality, a desire for repentance, and a reminder that only by your gracious gift are we given everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

At this time, we invite you forward, to be marked with the sign of ashes. After all have been imposed with the sign of the ashes, we will complete the liturgy of imposition of the ashes.

**As you mark on each person:**

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

*Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation,*  
**That we may show forth your glory in the world.**

*By the cross and passion of our Savior,*  
**bring us with all your saints**  
**to the joy of Christ's resurrection**

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who desires not the death of sinners, but rather that they may turn from their wickedness and live. He pardons and absolves all those who truly repent, and with sincere hearts believe his holy Gospel.

Therefore we beseech him to grant us true repentance and his Holy Spirit, that those things may please him which we do on this day, and that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure and holy, so that at the last we may come to his eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **Closing Hymn**

### **Pastoral Prayer**

Holy and merciful God,  
 we confess that the world is not as you created it to be.  
 Hear our prayers for the world and for one another:  
 In this world and in our lives, our love is imperfect and often fails.  
 Help us to love you with our whole heart, mind, and strength;  
 and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

In this world and in our lives, we have been deaf to your call to serve.  
 Strengthen us to be of service to those in need  
 with a spirit of generosity and kindness.  
 Equip us to join with others to build a kingdom of grace in the world you love.

In this world and in our lives,  
 anger, pride, and impatience hinder the vibrant, life-giving relationships  
 you desire for us all.  
 Through your tender mercy, restore our broken souls and broken communities  
 and heal our relationships with one another.

In this world and in our lives,  
 self-indulgence, envy, and greed contribute to the exploitation of others.  
 Open our eyes to the effects of our actions on the earth and all its people,  
 and give us courage to work for justice when we see it is lacking.

In this world and in our lives,  
false judgment, prejudice, fear, and contempt for others degrade human life.  
Stir in our hearts so we can recognize that all humanity is created in your image.  
Inspire us to treat others with reverence for the life you have given us all.

We offer these prayers and the unspoken prayers of our hearts  
in the name of Jesus Christ, whose blood paid the debt of our sins. **Amen.**

### **Benediction**

As we leave this place marked with a sign of the cross, might we remember that our  
call as disciples in this season is to live a repentant life and to seek the good for the  
whole of creation.

Life is short and we do not have long to make the way with those whom we love. Be  
swift to love. Make haste to be kind. And may the love of One God: Father, Son, and  
Holy Spirit, be with us, now and forever. **Amen and Amen..**