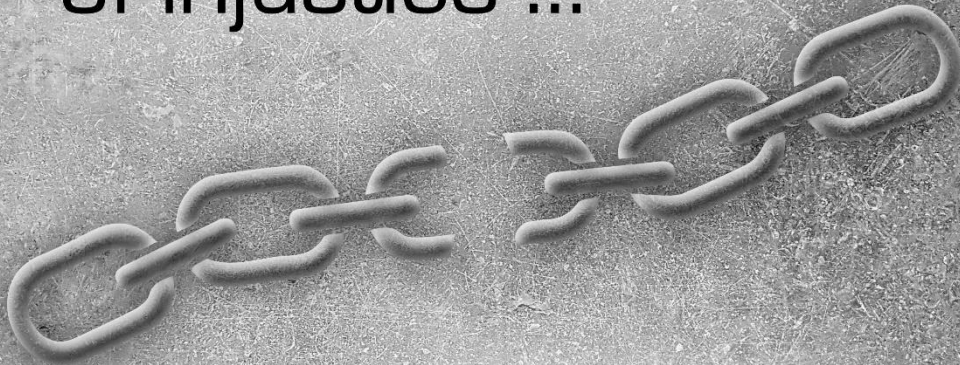


Is not this the fast  
that I choose:  
to loose the bonds  
of injustice ...



and to break  
every yoke?

ISAIAH 58:6, NRSV

**ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE**  
**Bethel Presbyterian Church**  
**February 22, 2023, 6:30 PM**

*\* Indicates congregation standing if able.  
Congregational responses indicated in bold.*

**GATHERING**

Prelude

Call to Worship (*L = Leader, P = People*)

L: We gather together at the edge of a new season.

**P: We stand together on the cusp of something new.**

L: Will we wade into self-reflection?

**P: Will we invite honesty to dance?**

L: Will we listen for God's invitation?

**P: Will we seek deeper faith?**

L: What kind of fast do we choose?

What kind of faith will we build?

**P: We gather together at the edge of a new season.**

L: Listen, God is speaking.

Choral Anthem

“ASHES ALONE”

Prayer

L: Let us pray: God, we want to hear your voice.

**P: Shout loudly; don't hold back.**

**Move in our spirits**

**the way you moved over the waters of creation.**

L: We are beginning a new season today, God,  
and we don't want to begin anything without you.

**P: So speak to us today –**

**through silence, through scripture, through song.**

L: Speak to us as you spoke to the Israelites so many moons ago.

**P: Speak to us like a gentle breeze or a loud trumpet.**

L: We don't care how we just long to hear your voice.

**P: So don't hold back. We are here. We are listening. Amen.**

Hymn No. 451

**“OPEN MY EYES, THAT I MAY SEE”**

*O-pen my eyes, that I may see  
glimps-es of truth thou hast for me.  
Place in my hands the won-der-ful key  
that shall un-clasp and set me free.*

*Si-lent-ly now I wait for thee,  
read-y, my God, thy will to see.  
O-pen my eyes; il-lu-mine me,  
Spir-it di-vine!*

*O-pen my ears, that I may hear  
voic-es of truth thou send-est clear.  
And while the wave notes fall on my ear,  
ev-ery-thing false will dis-ap-pear.*

*Si-lent-ly now I wait for thee,  
read-y, my God, thy will to see.  
O-pen my ears; il-lu-mine me,  
Spir-it di-vine!*

*O-pen my mouth, and let me bear  
glad-ly the warm truth ev-ery-where.  
O-pen my heart, and let me pre-pare  
love with thy chil-dren thus to share.*

*Si-lent-ly now I wait for thee,  
read-y, my God, thy will to see.  
O-pen my heart; il-lu-mine me,  
Spir-it di-vine!*

## THE WORD

### Prayer for Illumination

Merciful God, your word is our way of truth and life.  
Create in us hearts that are clean and put your Holy Spirit within us,  
so that we may receive your grace and declare your praise forever;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### Scripture Readings

Gospel	Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21	<i>(Concerning Almsgiving)</i>	Pg. 5
Prophet	Isaiah 58:1-12	<i>(False and True Worship)</i>	Pg. 647

### Homily: Is this the Fast That I Chose?"

#### Invitation to Observe a Holy Lent

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

Lent is a time to prepare for this celebration  
and to renew our life in the paschal mystery.

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.

This ancient sign speaks of the frailty and uncertainty of human life,  
and marks the penitence of this community.

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 meditating on God's word.

Now let us bow before God, our creator and redeemer,  
and confess our sin.

*(A time of silence is kept for reflection and self-examination)*

## Prayer of Confession

L: Merciful God, How many times in a day could we choose love?

**P: How many times could we choose justice?**

L: How many times could we speak kindly to ourselves?

**P: How many times could we offer grace?**

L: How many times, God? And how often do we miss it?

**P: Forgive us for choosing the path you did not travel.**

L: Forgive us for aligning ourselves  
with the world's measure of goodness, instead of yours.

**P: Return our hearts to you, and guide us continually,  
even in the parched places.**

L: With gratitude we pray,

**P: Amen.**

## Words of Forgiveness

Hear and believe the good news of the gospel:

no matter how many times we fall,

no matter how many times we choose the wrong path,

God is waiting for us at the end with open arms.

We are forgiven. We are invited. We belong.

Thanks be to God for a love like that. Amen.

## Special Music

“BEAUTIFUL THINGS”

## IMPOSITION OF ASHES

### Prayer

We bow our heads before you, O God,  
aware of our sinfulness and our shortcomings.

Remembering our baptism, the watermark of the cross upon us,  
we also receive this ashen cross upon our foreheads—  
another sign that in life and in death, we belong to you.

In the name of Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, and coming again,  
we pray. Amen.

Imposition (*People come forward*)

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

\* Hymn No. 433

**“SIGN US WITH ASHES”**

PHOENIX

*Refrain:*

*Sign us with ash-es, mer-ci-ful God,  
chil-dren of dust, as to dust we re-turn.*

*Sign us with ash-es, mer-ci-ful God.*

*Mark us and make us your own.*

*Sure-ly, you a-lone can save us.*

*You pay our price with pre-cious blood.*

*Reach-ing through your great com-pas-sion,  
you lift up your peo-ple with love.*

*(Refrain)*

*Sure-ly, you a-lone up-hold us.*

*You give us strength for all our needs.*

*Shield-ing with a fa-ther’s fa-vor,  
you bless us with par-don and peace.*

*(Refrain)*

*Sure-ly, you a-lone can heal us.*

*Yours is the will to make us whole.*

*Sooth-ing with a moth-er’s kind-ness,  
the con-trite of heart, you con-sole.*

*(Refrain)*

*Sure-ly, you a-lone can free us.*

*You break the bonds of guilt and sin.*

*Brac-ing, till we walk up-right-ly,  
you bol-ster our hope once a-gain.*

*Refrain:*

*Sign us with ash-es, mer-ci-ful God,  
chil-dren of dust, as to dust we re-turn.*

*Sign us with ash-es, mer-ci-ful God.*

*Mark us and make us your own.*

*Sure-ly, you a-lone re-fine us.*

*You give us grace for lives made new,  
forg-ing, through your fire and ra-diance,  
a sac-ri-fice wor-thy for you.*

*(Refrain)*

*Sure-ly, you a-lone re-deem us.*

*You fill our dust with ho-ly breath.*

*Burst-ing from the grave in glo-ry,  
you rise from the ash-es of death!*

*(Refrain)*

SENDING

Benediction

As you leave this place, may God bless you with seeking.

Seek out the hungry. Seek the weary.

Seek the good in every person you pass.

Seek out the hopeful. Seek the faithful. Seek God in each of us.

As you seek and as you wonder, may you find what you are looking for.

In the name of our loving God, who is always seeking us,  
go now in peace. Amen

*(All quietly depart)*