



On Ash Wednesday we begin our forty-day journey toward Easter with a day of fasting and repentance. Marking our foreheads with dust, we acknowledge that we die and return to the earth. At the same time, the dust traces the life-giving cross indelibly marked on our foreheads at baptism. While we journey through Lent to return to God, we have already been reconciled to God through Christ. We humbly pray for God to make our hearts clean while we rejoice that “now is the day of salvation.” Returning to our baptismal call, we more intentionally bear the fruits of mercy and justice in the world.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church

**February 18, 2026
6:30 PM**

We Gather Tonight in Silence

Please spend some time listening for what God might be saying to you in the silence. To begin our worship, the St. Stephen Ringers will play “O Lord, Throughout these Forty Days,” and the choirs will sing an anthem based on Psalm 51: “Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God” by Healey Willan.

Prayer of Confession (by Ann Siddall in Lent to Easter liturgies: Year C, inspired by Psalm 51)
On this first day of Lent we pause, look within and examine our consciousness.
Have mercy on us, O God, according to your steadfast love.

Where we have neglected prayer, been apathetic in worship, found reasons to avoid generosity, or lacked compassion: **Have mercy on us, O God, according to your steadfast love.**

Where we have colluded in the oppression of those who become invisible in their suffering, and ignored on the streets: **Have mercy on us, O God, according to your steadfast love.**

Where anxiety has eroded the gift of Your peace, and where we have cared too much about what others think: **Have mercy on us, O God, according to your steadfast love.**

As Lent begins, know that God understands how we struggle to stay open and compassionate. The invitation is not to focus on our inadequacies, but on God’s gift of grace and love which transforms our hearts and minds. That gift is given to us again, here and now. Be encouraged. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Day

God of the journey, accompany us this Lent as we remember the paths your Son, Jesus Christ, traveled. Enliven his story so that we may know you more fully. God who listens, receive our cries and the whispers of our hearts. Transform us daily to become more and more like you, living into your purpose for us. Let us soak in the baptismal promises you have given us all. Remind us how loving often begins with listening. We ask you to support us so we might truly listen this Lent. Let us perceive you with us and around us each day. **Amen.**

First Reading

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

¹Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sound the alarm on my holy
mountain!

Let all the inhabitants of the land
tremble,
 for the day of the LORD is coming, it

is near—
²a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and thick darkness!
 Like blackness spread upon the
 mountains
 a great and powerful army comes;
 their like has never been from of old,
 nor will be again after them
 in ages to come.

¹²Yet even now, says the LORD,
 return to me with all your heart,
 with fasting, with weeping, and with
 mourning;

¹³rend your hearts and not your
 clothing.

Return to the LORD, your God,
 for he is gracious and merciful,
 slow to anger, and abounding in
 steadfast love,
 and relents from punishing.

¹⁴Who 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?

¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sanctify a fast;

call a solemn assembly;

¹⁶gather the people.

Sanctify the congregation;

assemble the aged;

gather the children,

even infants at the breast.

Let the bridegroom leave his room,

and the bride her canopy.

¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar
 let the priests, the ministers of
 the LORD, weep.

Let them say, “Spare your people,
 O LORD,

and do not make your heritage a
 mockery,

a byword among the nations.

Why should it be said among the
 peoples,

‘Where is their God?’ ”

Reader: “The Word of the Lord.” Response: “Thanks be to God.”

The Cantor will lead the Canticle, please respond with this refrain when indicated:

Canticle of Joel

Second Lesson

2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10

^{20b}We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{6:1}As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says,

"At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you."

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see--we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Reader: "The Word of the Lord." Response: "Thanks be to God."

Lenten Gospel Acclamation

Let your steadfast love come to us, O Lord.
Save us as you promised; we will trust your word.

Gospel

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Response after announcement of the Gospel: "Glory to you, O Lord."

¹"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²"So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Response at the conclusion of the Gospel: "Praise to you, O Christ."

Homily

Pastor Jon Nelson

Hymn of the Day

Savior, When in Dust to You

ELW 601

(Final stanza sung in canon: High voices begin with low voices entering one measure later)

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Invitation to Lent

Friends in Christ, today with the whole church we enter the time of remembering Jesus' passover from death to life, and our life in Christ is renewed.

We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance and for God's mercy. We are created to experience joy in communion with God, to love one another, and to live in harmony with creation. But our sinful rebellion separates us from God, our neighbors, and creation, so that we do not enjoy the life our creator intended.

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to a discipline that contends against evil and resists whatever leads us away from love of God and neighbor. I invite you, therefore, to the discipline of Lent—self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love—strengthened by the gifts of word and sacrament. Let us continue our journey through these forty days to the great Three Days of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Confession of Sin

Ash Wednesday provides us with the gift of time and space for repentance. Let us prepare our hearts for the season of Lent by confessing our sins:

Righteous God, we join with worshipers all over the globe, uniting in our collective agreement that we desire to be more like you—more loving, more compassionate, more generous, more just, more patient, more faithful. And as we focus our gaze upon your perfection, we cannot help but witness the ways in which we fail to live according to that standard, both individually and collectively. We have failed on a global scale, perpetuating systems that damage whole groups of people, whole species of creation, and whole generations of children. (Silence)

We have failed on an individual scale in ways only we know in our minds and hearts. *(Silence)*

So, we confess these sins with full conviction that you bear our sins with compassion and completion. And when we confess our sins, we find liberation from the chains binding us. We pray these things in the name of the one who delivers us from sin. Amen.

Bless the Lord, O friends of God, and do not forget all God's benefits—
who forgives all our iniquity,
who heals all our diseases,
who redeems our lives from the Pit,
who crowns us with steadfast love and mercy.
Receive the peace of the complete pardon of Christ. **Amen.**

Imposition of Ashes

*At this time, if you desire to receive ashes, please come forward and kneel at the altar rail.
The pastor applies ashes to the forehead of each person with the words:
"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."*

Hymns:	<i>Remember That You Are Dust</i>	ACS 919 Bulletin page 13
	<i>Now Is the Time of Grace</i>	ACS 918 Bulletin page 14
	<i>Return to God</i>	ACS 921 Bulletin page 15

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 your Son, our Savior,
Bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.

The Prayers

Led by the Spirit, let us turn to God in prayer for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

God of our journeys, we pray for the church as the season of Lent begins. Guide your people in spiritual practices and preparation for baptism. Strengthen communities of faith in discipleship and witness for the sake of the gospel. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of creation, we pray for the earth. As you once brought forth life from the dust, breathe healing and renewal into all places where ecosystems are stretched and strained. Nurture organic cycles of life, death, and rebirth. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of the nations, we pray for an end to wars and occupations that reduce communities to ash. Turn leaders away from fearful decision-making, and lead all people into the justice and compassion of your reign Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of the suffering, we pray for all who live with any pain (*especially*). Comfort people living with chronic or terminal illnesses, addictions, or anxiety. Grant that all who dwell in the dust of grief may know your presence there. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of community, we pray for those who accompany the dying: for first responders, health care and hospice workers, chaplains, and those who facilitate burials of the dead. Sustain them as they serve their neighbors in life and death with dignity and care. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

God of the cross, we give thanks for those who have completed their lives on earth and have returned to you. Strengthen us with the promise that within the ashes of death are the seeds of resurrection life. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Receive the prayers of your people and draw all things together in your love, in the name of Jesus, who leads us from death to life. **Amen.**

Offering & Anthem Just As I Am

David Barton

Offertory Prayer

Gracious Provider, you set your immense treasures among us, opening your heart to the world. As we prepare to feast on your bountiful love, deepen our commitment to sharing those treasures with others, through our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. You call your people to cleanse their hearts and prepare with joy for the paschal feast, that, renewed in the gift of baptism, we may come to the fullness of your grace. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow - er and might,
 heav - en and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho -
 san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes in the
 name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Blessed are you, O God of the Universe.

Your mercy is everlasting and your faithfulness endures from age to age.

Praise to you for creating the heavens and the earth.

Praise to you for saving the earth from the waters of the flood.

Praise to you for bringing the Israelites safely through the sea.

Praise to you for leading your people through the wilderness to the land of milk and honey.

Praise to you for the words and deeds of Jesus, your anointed one.

Praise to you for the death and resurrection of Christ. Praise to you for your Spirit poured out on all nations.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink saying:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in remembrance of me.

With this bread and cup we remember our Lord's Passover from death to life as we proclaim the mystery of faith: **Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

O God of resurrection and new life: Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine. Bless this feast. Grace our table with your presence. **Come, Holy Spirit.**

Reveal yourself to us in the breaking of the bread. Raise us up as the body of Christ for the world. Breathe new life into us. Send us forth, burning with justice, peace, and love. **Come, Holy Spirit.**

With St. Stephen and your holy ones of all times and places, with the earth and all its creatures, with sun and moon and stars, we praise you, O God, blessed and holy Trinity, now and forever. **Amen.**

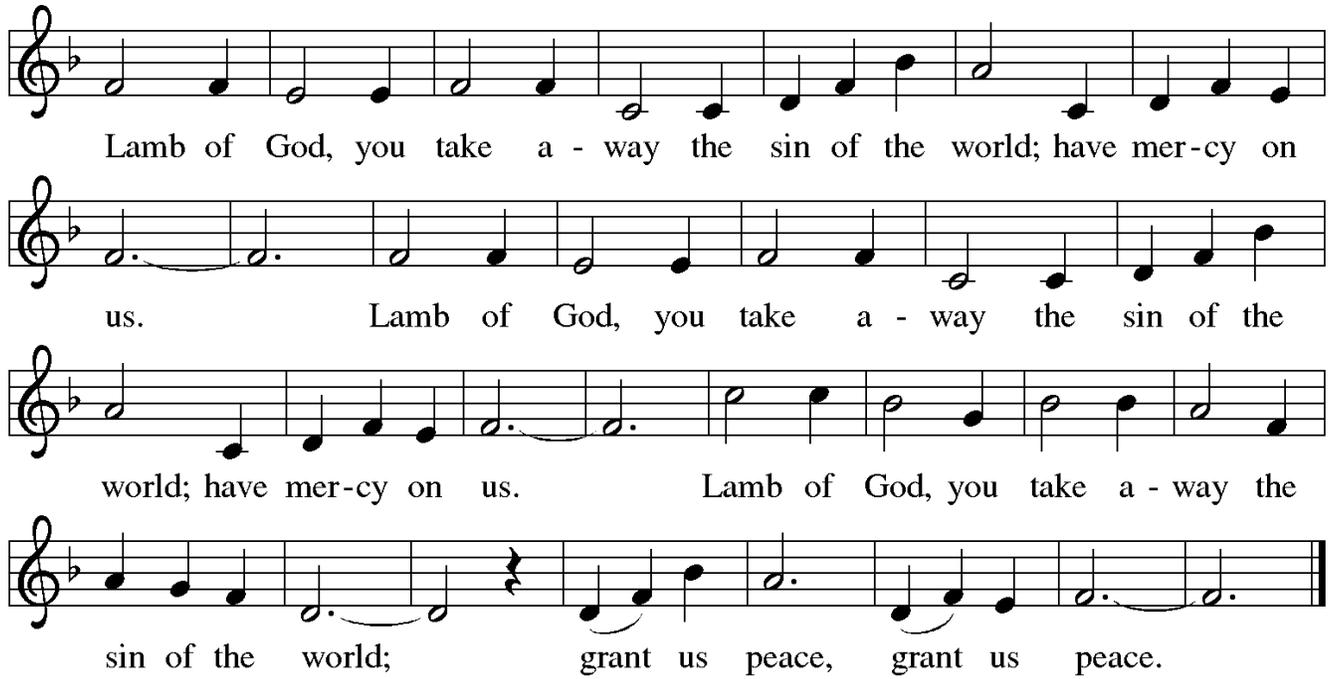
The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Holy Communion

When receiving Communion, either stand or kneel at the Rail. Pastor will distribute the bread and a Communion Assistant will come with a tray of pre-filled cups of wine and grape juice. The juice will be in the middle of the tray. Gluten-free wafers are available as an alternative to bread. St. Stephen is a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, so all are welcome to receive Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

Lamb of God



Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on
us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the
world; have mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

Lenten Journey:

Spirituals Medley

arr. Margaret R. Tucker

St. Stephen Ringers

The Journey *(Sing twice through in unison, then twice in canon)*

William H. Mathis

2. be - gins with one step."
3. "The jour - ney is the prize."'" data-bbox="77 513 894 769"/>

1
"A jour - ney of a thou - sand miles
2
be - gins with one step."
3
"The jour - ney is the prize."

Table Blessing

Prayer After Communion

Generous Host, you have shared your feast with us and made us new. Send us now to set tables of love and grace in our communities, that your liberating love might nourish the world into freedom, in the name of the crucified one, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Blessing

**God our tender parent, God the crucified one, God the reconciling Spirit, †
bless you now and forever. Amen.**

Sending Hymn *O Lord, Throughout these Forty Days* (Tune: *Land of Rest*)

O Lord, throughout these forty days
you prayed and kept the fast;
inspire repentance for our sin,
and free us from our past.

You strove with Satan, and you won;
your faithfulness endured;
lend us your nerve, your skill, and trust
in God's eternal word.

Though parched and hungry, yet you prayed
and fixed your mind above;
so teach us to deny ourselves
that we may know God's love.

Be with us through this season, Lord,
and all our earthly days,
that when the final Easter dawns,
we join in heaven's praise.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Care for others as God cares for you. **Thanks be to God!**

Savior, When in Dust to You

1 Sav-ior, when in dust to you low we bow in hom-age due;
2 By your help-less in-fant years, by your life of want and tears,
3 By your hour of dire de-spair, by your ag-o-ny of prayer,
4 By your deep ex-pir-ing groan, by the sad se-pul-chral stone,

when, re-pen-tant, to the skies scarce we lift our weep-ing eyes;
by your days of deep dis-tress in the sav-age wil-der-ness,
by the cross, the nail, the thorn, pierc-ing spear, and tor-tur-ing scorn,
by the vault whose dark a-bode held in vain the ris-ing God,

oh, by all your pains and woe suf-fered once for us be-low,
by the dread, mys-te-rious hour of the in-sult-ing tempt-er's pow'r,
by the gloom that veiled the skies o'er the dread-ful sac-ri-fice,
oh, from earth to heav'n re-stored, might-y, re-as-cend-ed Lord,

bend-ing from your throne on high, hear our pen-i-ten-tial cry!
turn, oh, turn a fa-v'ring eye; hear our pen-i-ten-tial cry!
lis-ten to our hum-ble sigh; hear our pen-i-ten-tial cry!
bend-ing from your throne on high, hear our pen-i-ten-tial cry!

Remember That You Are Dust

1* 2

Re - mem - ber that you are dust, and to

dust you shall re - turn.

The musical score is written on two staves in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics, with a first ending marked '1*' and a second ending marked '2'. The second staff contains the melody for the second line of lyrics. The lyrics are: 'Re - mem - ber that you are dust, and to dust you shall re - turn.' The music features a mix of quarter, eighth, and half notes, with some notes beamed together. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

* *May be sung in canon*

Text: Ash Wednesday liturgy

Music: CROSS OF ASHES, Mark Mummert, b. 1965

Music © 2009 Augsburg Fortress

Now Is the Time of Grace

The musical score is written on two staves in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff begins with a first ending bracket over the first two measures, and a second ending bracket over the last two measures. The lyrics are: "Now is the time of grace, now is the day of sal - va-tion." The second staff continues the melody with the lyrics: "Turn now, and seek God's face, now be-hold God's in-vi - ta-tion."

Text: Marty Haugen, b. 1950, based on 2 Corinthians 6:2 and Isaiah 58:6-9
Music: TIME OF GRACE, Marty Haugen
Text and music © 2009 Augsburg Fortress

Return to God

Leader



1 In all af - flic - tion
 2 With great en - dur - ance
 3 In ev - 'ry hard - ship
 4 With hum - ble spir - it
 5 By speech that's truth - ful
 6 To cease op - pres - sion
 7 By lov - ing jus - tice
 8 With gen - tle kind - ness

Assembly



1 In all af - flic - tion
 2 With great en - dur - ance
 3 In ev - 'ry hard - ship
 4 With hum - ble spir - it
 5 By speech that's truth - ful
 6 To cease op - pres - sion
 7 By lov - ing jus - tice
 8 With gen - tle kind - ness

All



re - turn, re - turn to God.

Text: Marilyn Haskel, b. 1945
 Music: RETURN TO GOD, Marilyn Haskel
 Text and music © 2009 Augsburg Fortress

Leading our Worship and Hospitality Today

Acolyte/Crucifer..... Harvey Nelson
Altar Guild Carol Wiers
Audio-Visual Team.....
Bread Baker.....
Communion Assistants Chris & Randy Punchard
Greeters/Hosts
LectorGeorge Martin
Pastor Pastor Jon Nelson
Tellers..... Tom & Sandy Peterkin and Sandy Croushore
Ushers.....Reed & Karen Nester