



Keeping a Holy Lent

ASH WEDNESDAY

March 1, 2017

7:30 pm

THE FIRST CHURCH IN ALBANY

(Reformed Church in America)

Founded in 1642

**110 North Pearl Street
Albany, NY 12207-2231**

(518) 463-4449

Email: info@firstchurchinalbany.org

www.firstchurchinalbany.org

ORDER OF WORSHIP

PRELUDE: *O Mensch, Bewein Dein Sunde Gross*
(*O People, Mourn your Wickedness*)

Johann Sebastian Bach

CALL TO WORSHIP

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Amen.

From dust we came, to dust we will return.

We belong to God.

We gather in penitence, we gather in confidence.

We belong to God.

At the beginning of lent, at every moment of our lives.

We belong to God.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Gracious God, you created us out of the dust of the earth and breathed into us the breath of life. Our lives begin and end in you. Even though we know we will die, help us to trust and not be afraid. When we are weak, teach us to look to you for strength. When we do wrong, teach us to turn to you and find forgiveness. When we die, help us to trust ourselves to you and await the gift of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*HYMN 81 *Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days*

ST. FLAVIAN

THE PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

GOSPEL READING Matthew 6: 1-6; 16-18 (read responsively)

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

²So 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.

³**But 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.

⁶**But 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.**

¹⁶And 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.

¹⁷**But 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.**

READING FROM THE PROPHETS Isaiah 58: 1-12

REFLECTION

INVITATION TO OBSERVE A HOLY LENT

**Gracious God, our hearts renew, make our spirits right and true.
Do not cast us from your sight, nor remove your spirit's light.
Your salvation's joy restore, make us steadfast evermore.**

THE BURNING OF THE PALMS AND THE SIGN OF THE NAILS

These palms, once fresh and green, remind us of our devotion and joy as we welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem.

These palms, now withered and dry, remind us that our ardor has faded, and in fear and selfishness we have turned away from our Lord.

Sung Response: (Hymnal #572)

Lord, have mercy upon us; Christ, have mercy upon us;

Lord, have mercy upon us.

In these ashes we are reminded of our sin.

In these ashes we are reminded of our mortality.

Sung Response

These nails remind us that in our sin we have wounded others and ourselves.

These nails remind us that Christ was wounded for our transgressions and by his bruises we are healed.

Sung Response

A LITANY OF CONFESSION

L: My brothers and sisters in Christ,
I confess before God and to you
that I have sinned in thought, word and deed
by what I have done and by what I have left undone.
I have not loved God with my whole heart.
I have not loved my neighbor as myself.
I am truly sorry and I humbly repent.

P: **May God have mercy on you,
forgive all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ,
grant you time to amend your life, strengthen you in all goodness,
and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life.**

L: Amen.

P: **We confess before God and to you
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed
by what we have done and what we have left undone.
We have not loved God with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and humbly repent.**

L: May God have mercy on you,
forgive all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ,
grant you time to amend your life, strengthen you in all goodness,
and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life.

P: **Amen.**

ANTHEM: *Lord for Thy Tender Mercy's Sake*

Richard Farrant

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. May these ashes remind us that we are mortal, that we have done wrong, and that it only by your gracious gift are we are forgiven and given everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

(During the imposition of ashes, the congregation is invited to join the choir in singing hymn 599, *Jesus, Remember Me*)

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

What is your only comfort in life and in death?

That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him. (from the Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 1)

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

*HYMN 542 *All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night*

TALLIS CANON

*BENEDICTION

*POSTLUDE: *Fughetta*

Josef Rheinberger

AΩ

*Congregation please stand

WORSHIP LEADERS: The Rev. John Paarlberg; the Choir of First Church in Albany;
Organist/Choir Director: Neil Keen

ANTHEM TEXT:

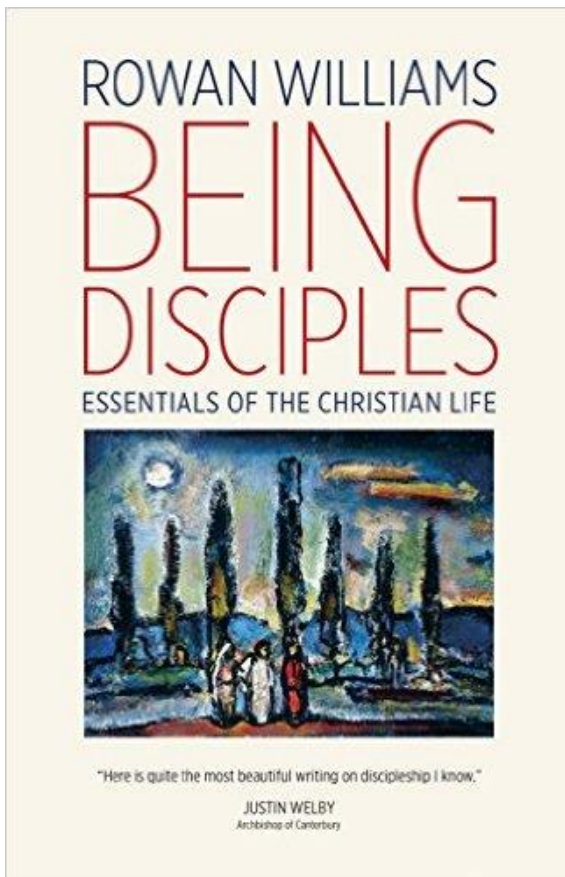
Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake, lay not our sins to our charge, but forgive that is past, and give us grace to amend our sinful lives: to decline from sin and incline to virtue, that we may walk in a perfect heart before thee now and evermore. Amen.

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent, the period of forty days, not including Sundays, preceding Easter. Historically, Lent began as a time of prayer and fasting by new converts to the Christian faith in preparation for their baptism at the service of Easter Vigil. Eventually Lent became a time of penance and preparation for all Christians.

The use of ashes as a sign of mortality and repentance has a long history in both Jewish and Christian worship. The biblical witness is found in the story of the creation and fall of humankind: “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). Abraham mentions ashes as a sign of humility before God: “Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord; I who am but dust and ashes.” (Genesis 18:27) Daniel makes use of ashes as a sign of penitence when he offers a prayer of confession on behalf of the people of Israel: “Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession....” (Daniel 9: 3-4a)

This first day of Lent reminds us (in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism) that two things are involved in genuine repentance: “the dying of the old self and the coming to life of the new.” The way to Easter is the way of the cross. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:3-4). New life with Christ involves a daily surrendering of the old life. The first step of this Lenten journey invites us to acknowledge our mortality and our sinfulness by the imposition of ashes.

Small Groups in Lent:



A small group will be meeting for prayer and discussion on Monday or Tuesday evenings in Lent beginning Monday, March 6, from 7 to 8:15 p.m. We will be using *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life*, by Rowan Williams, as a resource. "Discipleship," writes Williams, "is about how we live; not just the decisions we make, not just the things we believe, but a state of being."

This brief book about following Jesus and growing in faith has six chapters:

- Being Disciples
- Faith, Hope, and Love
- Forgiveness
- Holiness
- Faith in Society
- Life in the Spirit

If you are interested in participating and/or would like a copy of the book (\$6) please see John Paarlberg.