

PASTOR'S PAGE

Ash Wednesday, For What? By Steven A. Hein

February 14th, Valentines Day, is Ash Wednesday. It is the beginning of the Church's penitential season to survey our sin and death problem and prepare for God's solution in the passion and cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The traditional lessons for Ash Wednesday mark the frailty of human existence because we have a sin and death problem our own resources cannot overcome. We live under the curse of the ground that God pronounced after Adam and Eve rebelled against their Creator. You know what we say when our loved ones have passed, and their remains are laid to rest: ashes to ashes, dust to dust. On this day, ashes placed on the forehead are to remind us of our death problem. This act is contrary to the popular explanation of our age that death is an essential component to the life cycle. Rather, Ash Wednesday reminds us the death of all life that has come forth from the ground is because of God's curse in response to Adam's fall and loss of righteousness. Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden to live under the twin curse of death, spiritual and physical, because they lost and lacked righteousness. In that day, they died, and so did we. We have a death problem because we have a sin problem. We have become unrighteous and, therefore, dead in our trespasses. Death from the curse of the ground reminds us of death from the curse of the law. "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law and do them" (Gal. 3:10). The bad news of the curse is that there is no life with God without righteousness.

The traditional lessons for Ash Wednesday would have us ponder the symptoms of spiritual deadness and unrighteousness. Not what they look like among hardened criminal elements, but rather, what do they look like among the religiously committed? What are symptoms of spiritual decay that can show up even in our lives, for instance, when we may be tempted to show others that we are very religious and godly? Such efforts miss the character of true godly piety, which others might see but never intentionally. True selfless love of the neighbor provides support in an unassuming way. Needs are met perhaps unnoticed by others but always seen by God. Jesus spoke about this kind of loving piety that fasts with clean shining faces and supports the poor where the left-hand does not know what the right hand is doing (Matt. 6:3, 17). True godly loving actions are where your sacrifice and help are rather invisible. True godliness is spontaneous, joyful, unassuming, and never for show. Only God sees it, at least as far as you are concerned.

These observations exemplify that our problem of sin has produced, as Luther expressed, a mis-ordered life where loving devotion and our greatest concern are curved in upon ourselves. Moreover, Ash Wednesday's purpose is not to motivate our resolve to redouble our efforts to do better. Efforts to be selfless out of concern for your own spiritual benefit are defeated before they even begin. You cannot become more selfless out of self-concern.

The point of the lessons is this. By greater clarity about our problem of death, our shows of false godliness, and our inordinate self-love, God would have us heed his appeal: Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping, and mourning; 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" (Joel 2:12-13).

Ash Wednesday is God's invitation to prepare with penitent hearts to return to his grace and mercy as he is poised to accomplish a redemption that overcomes our problems of sin and death. His plan is to have us travel with Jesus to Jerusalem, where he will execute the deliverance we all need from the twin curses that hold us in death's grasp. With rent hearts – not garments or hand wringing – the gracious God intends to embrace us by the saving work of his Son. Let's face it: penitent hearts are not easy to come by. Our sinful-self rebels against the idea that we cannot improve on godliness by our own resolve. Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent, where our God is out to remind us of our death problem and to fashion repentant hearts. He provides us five weeks of Lent to survey our godless sinful condition in anticipation of the outpouring of his mercy and forgiveness in the cross of our Lord Jesus.

We need to remember that we embark not on the road to glory, but on a cross road, a cross experience, and a cross destination. We make our journey as baptized children of God who have already been united to Christ, the crucified, in whom we live and serve in his Church. So we begin in and with the cross. On the journey and at our destination, we shall meet up with Christ and his cross and thereby find ourselves, our true selves – apart from him in his law and in him in his gospel. We begin our journey reminded of our fundamental frailty, the death problem that reduces us to ashes. On the journey through the valley of the shadow, we shall meet and hopefully experience a death to sin from which we will find, again for the first time, righteousness and life in Christ, now and forever. So, gather up your dust . . . and let us be on our way.

02/22/2023 Steven A. Hein...Dr. Steven A. Hein serves as Director of the Concordia Institute for Christian Studies, an organization that offers auxiliary educational services to Christian gatherings across the country and the leadership of Lutheran Churches in West Africa. Dr. Hein also serves as an affiliate professor of theology at Concordia University, Chicago and the Institute of Lutheran Theology. He is the author of, "Christian Life: Cross or Glory?" and "You Can Give an Answer: A Study in Christian Apologetics."

I encourage all to attend Lenten service. Our theme is God on Trial.

Ash Wednesday will be celebrated at 6 pm on February 14 and midweek Lent services will be each Wednesday following until Palm Sunday. On Palm Sunday this year we will be celebrating the confirmation of Katelyn Regutis.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Steele



CHURCH CANCELLATION ANNOUNCEMENTS

In the case of bad weather this winter, please check TODAY'S TMJ4 TV station for church cancellations. You can also go online to tmj4.com or 620WTMJ on the radio. Any cancellations will also be announced on Facebook as well as our church website www.bethanylutherankohler.org

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

3 - Elsie Reinbacher
Cindy Fisher
5 - Richard Johnson
7 - Peggy Keller
14 - Thomas Yang
15 - Andrew Kraus



17 - Steve Perry
18 - Caleb Cox
23 - David Prange
Noah Fibiger
25 - Joe Wychesit
28 - Madison Fibiger

FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES

8 - James & Barbara Herzog
15 - Ken & Liz Buesing



Blessings to all that are celebrating this month!

If we missed a member's birthday or anniversary, please contact the church office, and let us know.



JANUARY/FEBRUARY CHARITY OF THE MONTH – Orphan Grain Train

During the months of January and February, all money collected from your "Designated Offerings" contribution envelopes will go **Orphan Grain Train**. Orphan Grain Train is a Christian volunteer network that shares personal and material resources with needy people in America and around the world. Grain Train volunteers gather donations of clothing, medical supplies, food, Christian literature, and other aid to meet real needs. For more information, visit their website at www.ogt.org



VALENTINE BREAKFAST FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL STUDENTS

On Sunday, February 11, the Sunday School children will be enjoying a breakfast prepared by the Sunday School teachers while they create Valentine cards that will be given to Bethany's shut ins.

We are collecting items that will be put into bags and given to the Community Café to distribute to the homeless in our community. We have extended our collection time. If you'd like to donate, items can be dropped off in the basket in the lower narthex any time until mid-March.



Blessing Bag Item Ideas

(travel sized items work best to fit into a gallon Ziploc bag):

Thermal socks
Gloves
Hand warmers
Toothpaste

Toothbrush
Deodorant
Wipes
Beef sticks

Snack sized crackers
Granola bars
Chapstick
Bottled water



LENT WORSHIP

Bethany will be participating in the Lenten Pulpit Exchange again this year. A different Pastor will be preaching at our midweek Lent service. Service time is 6:00pm. The schedule is as follows:

February 14 (Ash Wednesday) – Pastor Robert Steele

February 21 – Pastor Donald Johnson

February 28 – Pastor Alan Kretschmar

March 6 – Pastor Jim Schulz

March 13 – Pastor Bryan Osladil

March 20 – Pastor Matthew Shive



LENTEN SOUP SUPPERS

Join us prior to our midweek services for Lenten Soup Suppers each Wednesday beginning at 5pm starting with Ash Wednesday, February 14. We will have two soup choices, salad, rolls, and dessert. A free-will offering will be taken at each meal to help local organizations.



Help is always appreciated: Please sign up on the sheets in the lower narthex if you are able to help. High School students, this is a great way to earn volunteer hours! Also, bakers needed! If you can provide a dessert for soup suppers, sign up on the sheets. Thank you!

6 WEEK LENTEN SERIES – God on Trial

The unbelieving world has always insisted on putting God on trial. As our society becomes more secular, we Christians are increasingly aware of the many ways in which God—and his people—are judged. Temptations are many in this environment: treating unbelievers as enemies, retreating from the world, even questioning God ourselves. How do we live as people of God in this hostile world? We find our model—and our motivation—in Jesus. This series takes us back to the moments when God was literally on trial before men in the person of Christ. In these inspired episodes, we find forgiveness for us and all people, love for our enemies, strength for our faith, and courage to testify to the truth.



THOSE SERVING IN GOD'S HOUSE THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY 2024

Sunday, February 4
10:00 a.m.
w/Holy Communion

Elder: Andy Fibiger
Ushers: Ken Thompson, Bob Kuehlman
Altar Guild: Sue & Dave Prange
Scripture Reader: Todd Matte
Door Locker: Diane Marotz
Streaming: Austin Fibiger

Sunday, February 11
10:00 a.m.

Elder: Lee Gumm
Ushers: Dave & Sue Prange
Altar Guild: Rachel Johnson, Julie Steele
Scripture Reader: Mary Ann Fibiger
Door Locker: Ryan Brooks
Streaming: Todd Matte

Wednesday, February 14
6:00 p.m.
w/Holy Communion
Ash Wednesday

Elder: Gerry Luebke
Ushers: Jerry Sabrowsky, Dan Fibiger
Altar Guild: Shirley & Ray Ottman
Streaming: Andy Fibiger

Sunday, February 18
10:00 a.m.
w/Holy Communion

Elder: Steve Hazen
Ushers: Fibigers
Acolyte: Katlynn Regutis
Altar Guild: Liz & Ken Buesing
Scripture Reader: Sharon Werner
Door Locker: Steve Marotz
Streaming: Madison Fibiger

Wednesday, February 21
6:00 p.m.

Elder: Todd Matte
Ushers: Ray & Shirley Ottman
Streaming: Noah Fibiger

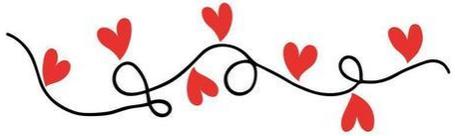
Sunday, February 25
10:00 a.m.

Elder: Shua Yang
Ushers: Alaric & Steve Hazen
Altar Guild: Barb & Karl Kaepler
Scripture Reader: Steve Hazen
Door Locker: Patrick Johnson
Streaming: Thomas Yang

Wednesday, February 28
6:00 p.m.

Elder: Steve Hazen
Ushers: Mattes
Streaming: Grace Matte

FEBRUARY 2024

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				01 10am Bible Study 7:15pm Dartball (home)	02	03
04 8:45am Sunday School & Confirmation 10am Worship w/HC	05 6:30pm Elders	06 6:30pm Board of Education	07 6pm Bible Study	08 10am Bible Study 7:15pm Dartball (home)	09	10
11 8:45am Sunday School & Confirmation 10am Worship	12 6:15pm Finance 7pm Council	13	14 5pm Soup Supper 6pm Ash Wednesday Service	15 7:15pm Dartball (away)	16	17
18 8:45am Sunday School & Confirmation 10am Worship w/HC	19	20	21 5pm Soup Supper 6pm Midweek Lent Service	22 7:15pm Dartball (home)	23	24
25 8:45am Sunday School & Confirmation 10am Worship	26	27	28 5pm Soup Supper 6pm Midweek Lent Service	29		