

Quispamsis United Church

Lent: Chasing the Light
February 22nd, 2023 – Ash Wednesday

Liturgical Colour: Purple

Presider: Rev. Richard Bowley

Director of Music: Stephen Alexander

Reader: Leslie Reid

Centering Passage: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

-Psalm 51:10-12

Opening Music

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Christ is the Light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome him. May we find strength and courage in the one who stands against the darkness as we stand in his light.

Welcome and Lighting of Affirm Candle

Acknowledgement of Territories

Greeting (Responsive):

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

Preparing for the Journey

Hymn:

O God How We Have Wandered

VU 112

**O God, how we have wandered and hidden from your face;
in foolishness have squandered your legacy of grace.
But how, in exile dwelling, we turn with fear and shame,
as distant but compelling, you call us each by name.**

**And now at length discerning the evil that we do,
by faith we are returning with hope and trust in you.
In haste you come to meet us, and home rejoicing bring,
in gladness there to greet us with calf and robe and ring.**

**O God of all the living, both banished and restored,
compassionate, forgiving, our peace and hope assured.
Grant now that our transgressing, our faithlessness may cease.
Stretch out your hand in blessing, in pardon, and in peace.**

Call to Worship (Responsive):

Come, you who are toiling, you who are bound-up;
Come, Liberating God, hear our cries for mercy!
Come, you who are lost, you who are hopeless;
Come Redeeming Christ, turn us to your light!
Come, you who are angry, you who are hurting;
Come, Cleansing Spirit, enter our hearts!
Come, for confession, for forgiveness, for restoration!
Come, O Holy One, free us, heal us, bless us!

Words of Welcome as We Chase the Light

Prayer of Confession (Responsive):

For the times when we are too rushed to care, when we are too tired to bother, when we don't really listen, when we act from motives other than love,
God, forgive us.

Silence

For our incapacity to feel the sufferings of others,
and our tendency to live comfortably with injustice,
God, forgive us.

Silence

For our failings in community, our lack of understanding,
God, forgive us.

Silence

For our lack of forgiveness, openness, sensitivity,
God, forgive us.

Silence

For the self-righteousness that denies guilt, and the self-interest that strangles compassion,
God, forgive us.

Silence

Assurance of God's Love:

Who are we, that God is mindful of us? God's fingers have shaped us, and God's breath gives us life. God's abundant mercy follows us with each step. In the life of Jesus Christ, we see a new

way to live. In following him, our lives are redeemed. Through Jesus Christ, we are all forgiven. Be at peace in God's grace.

Today's reading: Matthew 18:1-9

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling-blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling-block comes!

'If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the hell of fire.

This is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise be to you, O Christ.

Beginning the Journey

Message Seeking Greatness

Remembering our Baptism (Responsive):

Let us not retreat, but listen to the psalmist.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Out of the waters of baptism

we rise to new life, renewed, and one with Christ.

Prayer over the Ashes (Responsive):

These ashes remind us of our frailty and our mortality. This water proclaims the grace of God. The mark we bear calls us to walk the way of the cross.

God our creator, you have formed us out of the dust of the earth. May these ashes be to us a sign of our mortality and penitence, so that we may remember that only by your gracious gift are we given everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Saviour. AMEN

Prayer of the People & Lord's Prayer

Hymn:

Sunday's Palms are Wednesday's Ashes

VU 107

**Sunday's palms are Wednesday's ashes
as another Lent begins;
thus we kneel before our Maker
in contrition for our sins.
We have marred baptismal pledges,
in rebellion gone astray;
now, returning, seek forgiveness;
grant us pardon, God, this day!**

**We have failed to love our neighbours,
their offences to forgive,
have not listened to their troubles,
nor have cared just how they live;
we are jealous, proud, impatient,
loving overmuch our things;
may the yielding of our failings
be our Lenten offering.**

**We are hasty to judge others,
blind to proof of human need;
and our lack of understanding
demonstrates our inner greed;
we have wasted earth's resources;
want and suffering we've ignored;
come and cleanse us, then restore us;
make new hearts within us, Lord!**

The Mark of Ashes (Responsive):

From where do I look for help?

My help comes from God.

God marks us as God's own,

And so we mark ourselves, children of God.

Remember that you are part of God's holy earth: one with God in brokenness and blessing.

AMEN

All are invited to come forward to receive the ashes, marking them as followers of Christ.

On the Path Together

Prayer (Unison):

Merciful god, you called us from the dust of the earth; you claimed us for Christ in the waters of baptism. Look upon us as we enter these 40 days and bless our journey through the desert of Lent to the font of rebirth. May our fasting be hunger for justice; our prayer the chant of

humble and grateful hearts. All we do and pray is in the name of Jesus, for in his cross you proclaim your love. Forever and ever. AMEN

Hymn:

Abide With Me

VU 436

**Abide with me; fast falls the eventide:
the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
when other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
help of the helpless, O abide with me.**

**Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
change and decay in all around I see:
O Christ, who changes not, abide with me.**

**I need your presence every passing hour;
what but your grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like yourself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me.**

**I have no fear with you at hand to bless;
ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
where is death's sting? Where, grave, your victory?
I triumph still, if you abide with me.**

**Hold now your cross before my closing eyes;
shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;
heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.**

Commissioning and Benediction (Responsive):

Go now into your Lenten journey,

We go into the deepening reflection, repentance and know

Through the cross of Christ,

God has mercy on us, has pardoned us and sets us free.

Know that you are forgiven and be at peace.

AMEN

You are invited to go out in silence.

If you wish to remain for reflective personal prayer, take the time you need.