

ASH WEDNESDAY LITURGY

The Cornerstone Church. February 18, 2026.

CONCERNING ASH WEDNESDAY

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent: a time of reflection in preparation for the celebration of the resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Romans 6:23 sums up the dual themes of Ash Wednesday and Lent in general:

Romans 6:23 (CSB) For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The ashes are a reminder of sin leading to death, but the sign of the cross as the ashes are imposed points to eternal life in Christ.

These reminders lead us to Christ, our great Savior.

THE OPENING

We gather in the name of God ...

Grace to you and peace ...

The Lord be with you.

SONG

THE LITURGY

Call and Response

P: Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins.

A: His mercy endures for ever

Hear the Word of God:

1 Timothy 1:15 (CSB) This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” — and I am the worst of them.

Psalms 51:1-3 (CSB) Be gracious to me, God, according to your faithful love; according to your abundant compassion, blot out my rebellion. 2 Completely wash away my guilt and cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me.

Romans 3:23-24 (CSB) ... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; 24 they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Psalms 51:10-13 (CSB) God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not banish me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore the joy of your salvation to me, and sustain me by giving me a willing spirit. 13 Then I will teach the rebellious your ways, and sinners will return to you.

Romans 6:10-11 (CSB) ... the death Christ died, he died to sin once for all time; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, we are sinners saved by grace. We deserve death for our many sins, but we have received the gift of eternal life in Christ, our Savior. Grant us more grace to fight our sins by the power of the cross, and to live godly lives in the power of the resurrection. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

Pastoral Reflection

We're about to "impose" the ashes, but before we do, let's be clear about what we're NOT doing.

We are not earning forgiveness. We're not increasing our righteous standing with God. We're not pleading for cleansing from a God who is ready to condemn and reject us.

No. That is not the Gospel we believe in.

So, what is going on when we receive the ashes? Symbolically, we are "proclaiming" two simultaneous realities: 1) we are great sinners, and 2) God is a great Savior. We're saying that we are sinners who deserve nothing but condemnation. We must never forget that, never become proud, never boast of our spiritual attainments. But we're also saying that God is a great Savior who restores, forgives, and cleanses freely by his grace in Christ. And we must never forget that either. Live daily with Romans 5:8 ringing in your ears:

Romans 5:8 (CSB) But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We are simultaneously spiritual paupers and princes or princesses. So, we don't live in shame or on a treadmill of striving. We live in faith, in Christ, and at peace.

SONG

THE ASHES

Almighty God, grant that these ashes may be for us a symbol of the death we deserve and the life you graciously give us in Christ. Amen.

The ashes are imposed with the following words:

Dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ.

FINAL PRAYER

O Lord our God, grant us grace to desire you with our whole heart: that desiring you, we may seek you; and that seeking you, we may find you; and that finding you, we may love you; and that loving you, we may hate those sins from which you have delivered us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE BLESSING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you today and forever. Amen.