

# St. John's United Church of Christ

6 P.M. Worship

March 5, 2025

*Ash Wednesday*

WE PREPARE OUR HEARTS FOR THE WORD OF GOD

## Ringling of the Chimes

**Welcome** (*Please note the \* indicates when you should stand*)

### \*The Call to Worship

The Day of the LORD is coming, it is near!

**Our Lenten journey has begun.**

The LORD says, return to me with all your heart!

**Shall we crawl through these days with fasting and weeping and mourning?**

**Shall we tear our clothes and repent in sackcloth and ashes?**

No, fellow travelers, God's fast is different: to loose chains of injustice, to share food with the hungry, clothe the naked, offer help to the suffering, and walk humbly with our God.

**All praises to our God, let us return to him and follow the path of Jesus, for God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love!**

* Hymn	"Just as I Am, Without One Plea"	#339
Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bid'st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!	Just as I am, thou wilt receive, wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve; because thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!	
Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt, fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!	Just as I am, thy love unknown, hast broken ev'ry barrier down; now, to be thine, yea, thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!	

### \*Gathering Prayer (*In Unison*)

Holy One, open our hearts, lips, minds, and spirits, and we will declare your praise. We gather in your name and in your presence to worship you, to reorient our lives, and to direct our attention toward you. May your power flow through us as spirit meets spirit. As we reflect upon your goodness and the needs of the world, stir our hearts toward compassion and our lives toward active participation in your realm. Hear our prayers, delight in our songs, and speak through our words. Amen..

### Special Music

WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

### Prayer of Confession (*In Unison*)

God of Compassion, we turn toward you now. We rend our hearts.

Forgive our pride and forgive our insecurities.

Forgive our self-absorption and forgive our self-destruction.

Forgive our doubts and forgive our certainties.

Forgive our longing for attention and forgive our desire to hide.

Forgive each step we take away from you.

(Silence)

Create in us a heart for love, justice, and righteousness. Replace any guilt or shame with the hope of new life teeming with mercy and grace. Send your Spirit to be our companion in the choices we make and the ways that we relate to one another. Let hypocrisy be offensive to us, and honesty, humility, and truth become irresistible in our being. You have turned our dust into something marvelous. Let us honor you by living our days in faith, in connection, and in covenant with you and our human siblings. Renew us, O God, we pray.

## Words of Grace

### Scriptures: Joel 2:1-2,12-17

<sup>1</sup> Blow 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—  
<sup>2</sup> a 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.  
<sup>12</sup> Yet even now, says the LORD,  
    return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with  
mourning;  
<sup>13</sup> rend your hearts and not your clothing.  
Return to the LORD your God,  
    for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love,  
    and relenting from punishment.  
<sup>14</sup> Who 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?  
<sup>15</sup> Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
    consecrate a fast;  
call a solemn assembly;  
<sup>16</sup> gather the people.  
Consecrate the congregation;  
    assemble the aged;  
gather the children,  
    even infants at the breast.  
Let the bridegroom leave his room  
    and the bride her canopy.  
<sup>17</sup> Between 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?' "

### Reading "The Holy In the Ordinary" by Ann Weems

Holy is the time and holy is this place,  
and there are holy things that must be said.

Let us say to one another what our souls whisper . . .  
O holy One, cast your tent among us;  
come into our ordinary lives and bless the living!

Forty days stretch before us,  
forty days of hungering after faithfulness,  
forty days of trying to understand the story,  
and then Holy Week . . .  
O God, if every week were holy . . .

These forty days stretch before us,  
and those of us who believe  
yearn to feel Your presence,  
yearn to be Your people;  
and yet, the days fill with ordinary things  
with no time left  
for seeking the holy.

Spiritual contemplation is all right  
for those who have the time,  
but most of us have to make a living.

Most of us have to live in the real world  
where profanity splashes and blots out  
anything holy.

Where, O Holy One, can we find You in this unholy mess?

How, O God, can we find the holy in the ordinary?

### **Scripture: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

#### **Concerning Almsgiving**

<sup>6</sup> Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

<sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your alms may be done in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

#### **Concerning Prayer**

<sup>5</sup> “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. <sup>6</sup> 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.

#### **Concerning Fasting**

<sup>16</sup> And whenever you fast, do not look somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so 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.

#### **Concerning Treasures**

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

One: This is the Word of the Lord.

**ALL: Thanks be to God.**

#### **Homily**

* Hymn	<i>“There’s A Wideness to God’s Mercy”</i>	#73
<b>There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea; there's a kindness in God's justice, which is more than liberty.</b>	<b>For the love of God is broader than the measure of our mind; and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.</b>	
<b>There is welcome for the sinner, and more graces for the good! There is mercy with the Savior; there is healing in his blood.</b>	<b>If our love were but more simple, we would rest upon God's word; and our lives would be illumined by the presence of our Lord.</b>	

## WE RESPOND TO THE WORD OF GOD

### **Invitation to Give Generously**

*(Thank you for being so generous in your care of St. John's UCC and its mission, through your participation and giving. Your stewardship makes a difference.)*

### **Offertory**

### **\*Doxology**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise God, all creatures here below;  
Praise God above, you heavenly hosts;  
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One. Amen.

### **\*Prayer of Dedication *(In Unison)***

Generous God, we thank you for opening our hearts to the needs of your creation. May your glory and love be revealed in our community by our simple, everyday offerings. Amen.

### **Imposition of Ashes**

## COMMUNION

### **Invitation**

### **Telling the Story**

### **Blessing the Elements**

### **Sharing the Meal *(the gluten free wafers are on a separate tray)***

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Even as we come to the table tonight remembering our frailty with the dust on our heads, we also give God our thanks for this meal. We give our gratitude that we have come together as one Body of Christ. In these next 40 days and as we walk the road to the crucifixion, continue to keep us awake to the ways we can bring Jesus the Christ's peace and love to our world. Amen

## WE GO FORTH TO SERVE

### **\*Hymn**

*"Lord, I Want to Be a Christian"*

**#589**

Lord, I want to be a Christian in-a my heart, in-a my heart;  
Lord, I want to be a Christian in-a my heart.  
In-a my heart, in-a my heart,  
Lord, I want to be a Christian in-a my heart.

Lord, I want to be more loving in-a my heart, in-a my heart;  
Lord, I want to be more loving in-a my heart.  
In-a my heart, in-a my heart,  
Lord, I want to be more loving in-a my heart.

Lord, I want to be like Jesus in-a my heart, in-a my heart;  
Lord, I want to be like Jesus in-a my heart.  
In-a my heart, in-a my heart,  
Lord, I want to be like Jesus in-a my heart.

### **Benediction**