



ASH WEDNESDAY DEVOTIONAL

FEBRUARY 22, 2023

Today is Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday sets the table for the season of Lent. Lent is our annual journey with Jesus towards a deeper relationship by way of the cross and into resurrection life.

Take a moment to pause and breath in and out slowly.

Intentionally.

Rest in and welcome God's grace-filled table.



As we begin Lent this year how do you find yourself? Where are you hungry in your life? Where are you well fed?

Is your relationship with your best friend or spouse a feast for your soul? Or leaves you hungry for more?

Or is your hunger due to how rich and fulfilling those relationships really are and you can't wait to have more.

In which way does this reflect your relationship with Jesus?

Well-fed and hungry for more—or malnourished and dehydrated?

Can you discern why?

Take a moment to acknowledge and accept how you are right now and imagine yourself accepting the invitation of Jesus to sit at His table no matter how you are feeling in this moment



The season of Lent has long been a time of self-examination. A time of listening and discerning the Holy Spirit's refining in ones' life. Many approach Lent out of ritual or duty.

This year we invite you the table of Lent with the same expectation as having dinner with your favorite people—in your favorite eatery. Only now, imagine that Jesus is your host and He invites you out of His longing to have a deeper relationship with you. This annual forty-day journey offers us a powerful way to reflect on our relationship with Jesus so we can recognize and let go of anything in our lives that hinders God's transforming grace.

During this season of Lent, we will create space to listen to Jesus through a number of stories around tables—where Jesus invites us to embrace a more beautiful way of living through Him.

Our hope and prayer on this year's Lenten journey is that we would come to the table, with a discerning ear to the voice of Jesus and to feast on His soul transforming stories.

And as our souls are transformed—we would follow the invitation of Jesus to take, eat and remember Him, as we are filled by the Spirit's presence.



When you hear the invitation to come to the table with Jesus on our Lenten journey—what stirs in your mind and heart? Is it comforting? Frightening? Hopeful? Intriguing?



At the beginning of our Lenten Journey, we offer this affirmation of intention and commitment to be with Jesus. To listen to Jesus. To be shaped by Jesus. To Love Jesus.

As you prepare your heart and mind to reflect and pray this affirmation, do so with the knowledge that, in this moment, God is offering an open, loving hand of commitment for your ongoing flourishing at His table.

†

Then Jesus climbed a hill and sat down with his disciples around Him. (It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration.) Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for Him. Turning to Philip, He asked, "Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?" He was testing Philip, for He already knew what He was going to do.

Philip replied, "Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money to feed them!" Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. "There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?"

"Tell everyone to sit down," Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward He did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told His disciples, "Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted."

So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves. When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, "Surely, He is the Prophet we have been expecting!"

John 6: 3–14, NLT

†

What do you believe was going through the mind and heart of the boy as he listened to Jesus pray over his lunch and start offering it to people...and kept offering it...and kept offering it—until ALL were full—and there were leftovers?

†

One way to actively come to the table this Lenten season, is through the traditional practice of Keeping Lent.

We Keep Lent by giving over to Jesus something we normally do or have and look to Jesus to transform our offering—into something that will bless others.

In other words, Keeping Lent isn't about ritual but relationship.

In our story today, we have a table set in the midst of a hungry crowd.

On that table one small boy offers to Jesus what he has—a few fish and a few pieces of bread.

But in the hands of Jesus the small sacrifice of one—becomes a feast to bless the many.

Set your Lenten journey in the same way. Over the course of the next forty days what can you offer to Jesus—looking for how others might be blessed.

We might start with a desire to move from anger to joy by declaring to Jesus, "Jesus less of my anger and more of your patience." Or Jesus help me let go of my self-centeredness and embrace more of your self-sacrifice towards others."

This heart-set is reinforced on our Lenten journey when we can translate it into practical terms or physical reminders.

Let's say you let go of watching TV; so instead of watching TV you grab hold of the extra time, creating space for Christ by reading the Bible, doing a prayer walk through your neighborhood, or grocery shopping for your elderly neighbor.

Or say you let go of your daily Starbucks; you now grab hold of the extra money that you would usually spend and invest it in a neighbor in need or one of Christ Church's local mission's partners.

†

What are some ways you can Keep Lent this year? What is something you normally do or have that you can let go of—that you can turn over to Jesus so He can deepen your relationship with Him and bless others?



What less than Jesus like character quality would you offer to the Holy Spirit to be replaced by the character of Christ?



As you hear a portion of today's Scripture again, place yourself in the small sandals of the boy and watch with wide eyed wonder what happens when we give over what we have into the hands of Jesus. Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. "There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?"

"Tell everyone to sit down," Jesus said...Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward He did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told His disciples, "Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted." So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves. When the people saw Him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, "Surely, He is the Prophet we have been expecting!"

John 6:8-14, NLT



In these final moments today, picture Jesus sitting across from you at that most used table in your home.

Now talk to Jesus about what stirs in you as you imagine yourself keeping Lent over the next forty-days by turning over to Him what you have—so He can transform you and bless others.

Come!

Come to the table!

Jesus is expecting you!