

**Devotions for the First Four Days of Lent:
Ash Wednesday, March 6 – Saturday, March 9**

Cry of the Prophet

Is that the sort of fast that pleases me, a day when a person inflicts pain on himself? Hanging your head like a reed, spreading out sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call fasting, a day acceptable to the Lord?

Is not this the sort of fast that pleases me: to break unjust fetters, to undo the throngs of the yoke; to let the oppressed go free, and to break all yokes? Is it not sharing your food with the hungry or sheltering the homeless poor; if you see someone lacking in clothes, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own kin?

Isaiah 58: 5-8

Video Story: Sharing of the Ashes at St. John's (MI) First UMC

Please see a wonderful Ash Wednesday story that was presented at last year's Michigan Annual Conference. The story is embedded within a longer presentation. Please go to <https://vimeo.com/273009173>; the relevant part begins at about 8 min 37 sec, and goes for 4 minutes. It is an example of what the Vital Church program is urging us to do and be.

Readings

Ninety-seven percent of all newcomers to a church have had a major life transition in the past two months, according to [recent research]. They are going through some sort of significant change or challenge. This could be a move, a new baby, the death of a loved one, an accident or a job loss.

Get Their Name, by Bob Farr, Doug Anderson and Kay Kotan, p. 82.

My son [10-year-old Dev] told me he wanted to go to church. When I asked him why, he said, "To see if God is there."

Writer Mary Karr, describing her recovery from alcoholism and conversion to Roman Catholicism, in her memoir, **Lit**.

Reflection

- Think about what it would be like to attend a church you are not familiar with. What would help you to experience God in that new place? How would you discern "if God is there?"
- Have you ever felt profoundly welcomed in a place where you were a stranger? What was it about that experience that made it moving or significant?
- What does it mean to you to welcome someone in the name of Christ? Or to welcome someone as if he or she was Christ? Is it different from simply being friendly and polite?

Poem for Ash Wednesday

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre, [when]
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on darkness....

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love,
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.

Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

From T. S. Eliot, "East Coker"

Provided in **A Service for Ash Wednesday**, spaciousfaith.com

Prayer

Dearest Lord,
Help me to notice the stranger, and offer Your welcome.
Help me to see my neighbor, and offer Your love.
In Christ's holy name, Amen.