

# DUST & ASHES

*A Self-Guided  
Ash Wednesday  
Prayer Walk  
at Home*





**WELCOME**

Welcome to Dust and Ashes,  
a Self-Guided Ash Wednesday Prayer Walk.

For over ten centuries, Christians have celebrated Ash Wednesday to commemorate the beginning of Lent, our 40-day preparation towards the Resurrection Celebration of Easter.

In the ancient church, Lent marked a holy season, set apart for new converts to be instructed in the ways of the Faith as they prepared for their baptism.

In time, believers also came to see Lent as a season to be reminded of the frailty of human life, that we are dust and to dust we shall return, and in that knowledge, it also offered an opportunity for those caught in persistent sin or shame to focus on repentance and renewal.

Now, we invite you to acknowledge this truth by also setting aside this season as different, as holy, set apart. In doing so, we impress on our hearts the unchanging nature and truth of the Gospel, that we are made from dust, and to dust we shall return, but because of Jesus, dust is not our destiny.

To open this season, we invite you to engage with each of the station on your own at home. Each station will offer reflections, prayers, responses, and a way for children to engage. We'd invite you to gather supplies with what you have on hand at home. If you'd like, light a candle to set this time and space apart.

If you'd like to, you are welcome to remove your shoes as you engage in the prayer walk, as a symbol of remembrance that this space and time is holy.

# AN INVITATION

## **BE PRESENT**

God is living and active and here right now,  
longing to engage with us.

If it would be helpful to you, take a moment to jot down in a journal anything you're carrying in your mind that might be distracting you. You may choose to close the journal - those things will be there when you are finished! Or or you can bring it with you and invite Jesus to speak into even those distractions.

*\*In order to be fully present, try to find a quiet space, free of distractions. We'd encourage you to turn off your cell phone during this time.*

## **BE YOURSELF**

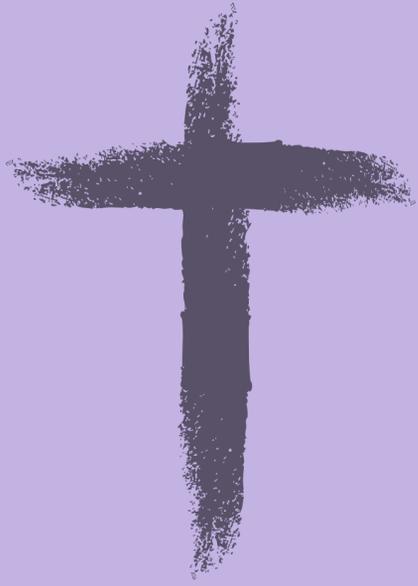
What we offer here are prompts and invitations, not requirements. If you are thinking about one of the stations and the Holy Spirit invites you to explore a new part of your heart, follow in that direction. However you choose to engage or respond, whether God is doing a deep work in you and you end up crying, or all of this is new and you're just taking it all in...no matter what, picture God smiling upon you.

## **KIDS!**

We love you! God loves you! God wants to speak to you, too. Every station has an activity or a question for you to think about with your grown-ups. We hope you feel Jesus' love for you as you walk around the room.

## **INVITE THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST TO BE WITH YOU**

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God's holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all God's benefits, who forgives all your sins and heals all your infirmities, who redeems our lives from the grave, and crowns us with mercy.



# TO GATHER

## **What you will need for each station:**

- Station 1: A handful of dirt
- Station 2: A bowl of water
- Station 3: Journal & Pen
- Station 4: A teaspoon of cooking oil
- Station 5: Bread and wine (or something to symbolize each - whatever is on hand)
- Station 6: Journal & Pen
- Station 7: Ashes, or a burnt matchstick head
- Station 8: Candle or tealight & matches
- Closing Station: Piece of paper and a pen

# DUST

## READ

*This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:4-7)*

## REFLECT

There is a pun in the Hebrew in this passage...the word *'adam* means human, and the word *'adamah* means soil or earth. The Genesis account cleverly says that we are *'adam* from *'admah* "humans" from "humus," creatures from the earth. Literally, we are earthlings. We often translate this as "dust." *"God formed a human from the dust of the ground..."* Apart from God we are indeed simply dust. Yet into our dust God has breathed, not only the breath of earthly life, but also the breath of God's own Spirit.

You are more than dust and bones. You are made in the image of God, full of breath and life and creativity, the spitting image of super and natural.

## RESPOND

Press your thumb into the dirt. Reflect on the substance from which all life comes. Breathe deeply and reflect on the breath of God, the gift of life that God provides with each breath. What are you grateful for about the gift of life today?

## PRAY

O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature. Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever.

# STATION 1



# WATER

## READ

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:13-17)*

## REFLECT

It's interesting, isn't it, the moment when God tells Jesus he's beloved. It's right at the beginning of the story. As far as we know, Jesus hasn't healed any lepers or cast out any demons or preached any good news to the poor. At this point in the story, Jesus hasn't done anything to make God so delighted with him. God simply is delighted with him. And it's at this point in this story, before Jesus has done anything to earn it, that his main identity is heard most clearly without distractions: "You are my beloved son, and with you, I am well-pleased."

In Christ, we too, are given our identities. When God looks at us, God sees us through the lens of Jesus, and adopts us into that identity too. It has nothing to do with what you have done or will do or can do. You are loved and valued, not because of how hard you work or how much you do, but simply because God has declared that you are. There is nothing you can do to earn that love, and nothing you can do to lose it.

## RESPOND

Put your hand into the bowl of water. If you've been baptized, remember your own baptism. If you haven't yet been baptized, consider what baptism could mean for you. Listen to God say to you, "This is my Beloved." Think about a person in your life who has shown you God's love. What did that feel like? How can you demonstrate God's love to someone else today, not because they've earned it, but simply because God says they are beloved?

## PRAY

We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it, the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it, you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it, your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life. We thank you, God, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. May we always remember that we are your beloved.

# STATION 2



# SAND

## READ

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' (Matthew 4:1-4)*

## REFLECT

Jesus has just been told that his main identity and his first call are to be God's beloved. And so it's no surprise that when Jesus meets the devil in the desert, the devil goes straight for Jesus' identity, and tries to pick away at it. The temptation story in Matthew, found just after Jesus' baptism, isn't as much about what Jesus is tempted to do but who Jesus is tempted to be. We see this in that key word that comes up several times from the mouth of the devil: *IF*. If you really are the Son of God, if you're really who you claim you are...prove it.

I don't imagine that most of us will find ourselves in the middle of the desert in a battle of wits with our arch nemesis. But we can be certain in this life, that our identities - as beloved of God - will be tested, too. Over time, we'll get distracted by both words of praise and words of condemnation, tempting us away from who God says we are.

In our lives, we are constantly tempted to believe false truths about ourselves, lies that say we aren't good enough, smart enough, successful enough, pretty enough, fill in the blank. But God's truth is that Christ is enough for us. When we identify with Jesus' death and new life, we share his identity as beloved, no matter how often we're tempted otherwise.

## RESPOND

What desert are you in right now? Where do you feel vulnerable, wounded, tired or alone? What messages are you hearing in the wilderness, from yourself or others? Reflect on the lies you are tempted to believe about yourself today. Write in your journal what those lies are. Now write a truth that God wants you to believe instead.

## PRAY

Spirit, who leads me into the desert, I come before you fully aware of my need for you to write my identity, for how often I am tempted away from it. Turn my nose from the other scents around me, that I may know the sweet fragrance of Christ. Numb my tongue from all else that allures it, so that I may taste anew the bread of my salvation. Dull my touch to all other sensations, that I feel only the pulse of my heart longing to reconcile with my neighbor, and you, my maker. Stop my ears from the things that might lure them away, so that I may hear your song of mercy calling me back to your embrace. Blind my eyes from the things that distracts them, so that I may gaze fully on the light of Christ.

And once we have met here in the wilderness, then return me to the world. Send me back among your people. That I may fill their senses with all I have found in you, that in and through Jesus, we are your beloved sons and daughters.

# STATION 3



# OIL

## READ

*Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."*

(John 12:1-8)

## REFLECT

Anointing with oil is an ancient practice. Kings and queens, priests and other rulers were anointed and marked as special. Mary anoints Jesus' feet to indicate the kind of ruler he is...not one who rules over people but one who serves people. In many cultures, soon after death the body is anointed with oil and perfume. Jesus says this oil is also to be used for his body after he dies.

Chrim is a special oil made from spices and fragrances. In some traditions, Chrim is used during baptism to indicate the seal of the Holy Spirit on the forehead. During a traditional Ash Wednesday service, the ashes we put on our foreheads go on top of that anointing, to signify that nothing, not even our own death, can take away the love of God, and the sign that we are beloved. This is an outward sign of an inward reality that God ordained before time itself. The oil does not put God's favor on you. Only Jesus can do that. And if you're in Christ, He has! God knew who you would become before you were born. God knew the sin you'd commit, and the shame you'd carry, no matter how hidden you think it is. And God sent God's own Son to die for you, so that you would be given new life.

## RESPOND

Touch the oil and imagine God's favor on your forehead. If you wish, trace a cross on your forehead with the oil, or the palms of your hand. Remember that you are anointed, *"marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit..."* (Eph. 1:13)

What part of your life do you need to surrender to God's anointing today?

## PRAY

Almighty God, we thank you that by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ you have overcome sin and brought us to yourself, and that by the sealing of your Holy Spirit you have bound us to your service. Renew in us the covenant you make with us at our baptism. Send us forth in the power of that Spirit to perform the service you set before us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

# STATION 4



# STATION 5



## BREAD & WINE

### READ

*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:26-29)*

### REFLECT

Jesus and his disciples are celebrating the Passover meal and for years before this one, this meal has been a remembrance of salvation, freedom, deliverance.

As Jesus breaks the bread and passes it around, he infuses it with new meaning. The bread of the Passover looks backward, remembering when the Jews left Egypt in a hurry. But the bread of the Last Supper looks forward. It declares Christ's body broken for them and for us, eternal meat and manna, our daily bread *ad infinitum*, offered every moment of every day for everyone.

When Jesus pours the cup, he infuses it with new meaning. The wine of the Passover looks backward, remembering salvation and freedom and deliverance. But the wine of the Last Supper looks forward. This is Christ's blood shed for them and for us, the cup of the covenant poured out for many, the forgiveness of sins seventy-times-seven times over and then some.

The shock the disciples must have felt when they realized the cup of salvation he was talking about was coursing through his own veins, a new covenant of his blood, spilled out like wine for the forgiveness of sins - their sins and the sin of the world. The sacrifice he spoke of was not some unblemished Passover lamb but his own body, sliced in two like broken bread, the bondage he'd break would be theirs.

Though we are created in God's image, called beloved, and anointed, we all fall short of the glory of God. Yet grace happens to us anyway. We are not invited to this table because we have it all together, but because we don't.

So take a moment to pray the following prayer of confession.



## **PRAY**

Most holy and merciful God: Together with the church, we confess to you that we have sinned in thought, word, deed, and attitude; by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength.

We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven. We have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit.

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness: the pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives, Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work.

Have mercy on us Lord,  
And forgive us our sins.

### ***Take a moment for personal, silent confession.***

Lord, you are compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. You will not always accuse, nor will you harbor your anger forever; You do not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is your love for us; as far as the east is from the west, so far have you removed our transgressions from us. Amen.

## **RESPOND**

Eat the bread and wine (or whatever you have to symbolize the elements).  
As you do, remember Christ's body, broken for you and Christ's blood, shed for you.

# CROSS

## READ

*From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")...And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.*

*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom....When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:45-54)*

## REFLECT

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of Lent, which ends in Holy Week when we remember the story of the cross, the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Highrock as a family of churches has traditionally set aside the season of Lent as holy by practicing the discipline of fasting. While some make it a practice to fast from modern indulgences like Facebook or sweets, others choose to make a more traditional fast by abstaining from meat throughout the season or even choosing to abstain from food entirely one day a week.

When we refrain from something we want, we become more conscious and aware of that thing. Most of us don't think about the air we breathe very much, but imagine that you were on a spaceship. You might think more about oxygen. When we set that thing apart, we consecrate it and make it sacred. That's what a sacrifice is - to make sacred.

That's what fasting is about. By going without something good, or without something we want, we can become more mindful of our dependence on God for all things. Fasting can make us more aware of our vulnerability and our need for God's grace and goodness. In a unique way, fasting can turn our attention toward our need for the cross and the empty tomb.

When we feel hunger pangs, or a desire for something we are fasting from, it can remind us of Christ's sacrifice for us, and provide an invitation to make space in our lives for God when otherwise, we might have filled our time, our stomach, our minds with something else.

# STATION 6





### **RESPOND**

In your journal, draw the shape of the cross. Ponder the reality of it.

During Lent, sometimes people give up things because they feel these things are keeping them from growing closer to God. Sometimes people take on something new, if they feel that a new practice would draw them closer to God.

If you were to give yourself permission to do one thing that would draw you closer to God in these 40 days, what would it be? Write it down in your journal.

Make that your Lenten practice.

### **PRAY**

Now pray the prayer Jesus taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father, who is in heaven,  
hallowed be your name  
Your Kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven  
Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our sins, as  
we forgive those who have sinned against us  
And lead us not into temptation  
But deliver us from evil  
For yours is the Kingdom,  
and the power,  
and the glory forever and ever.

# ASH

## READ

*"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."* (Genesis 3:17-19)

## REFLECT

Shortly after Adam and Eve committed the first sin, we hear God utter some of the most haunting words in all of scripture, "for dust you are, and to dust you will return." In the earliest church observances of Ash Wednesday, Christians who had gotten stuck in persistent sin had ashes sprinkled on their bodies as a sign of repentance, just as Job repented to God "in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6).

Later, around the tenth century, all believers began to signify their need for repentance by having ashes placed on their foreheads in the shape of a cross as a reminder that it is in the futility of death -- Christ's death -- that we find our hope. Because the ashes are imposed in the shape of the cross, they also give us confidence for the good news that is yet to come, that on the Cross all that would keep us in death was Crucified with Christ.

Thus, the ashes so imposed are a vivid reminder that our mortality leads us, not to despair, but to hope. It points not to defeat, but to the coming victory of Easter. We can face death. We can admit our own mortality. We can talk openly about the limits of this life because we know that through Christ we have already entered into life eternal, and a fullness of life that will not end even when our mortal bodies return to dust.

## RESPOND

Put your thumb in the ashes or on the matchstick head. Sprinkle them on your head, or shape a cross onto your forehead or the forehead of someone with you. If you are alone, look at yourself in the mirror.

As you do, say "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Repent and believe the Gospel." It is in and through this Gospel - the good news of Jesus - that we can hope for life beyond the grave.

## PRAY

God our Father, you create us from the dust of the earth: grant that these ashes may be for us a sign of our repentance and a symbol of our need for you; for it is by your grace alone that we receive eternal life in Jesus Christ our Savior.

# STATION 7



# LIGHT

## READ

*After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:11)*

## REFLECT

Candles are peaceful, ancient. Humans have been lighting candles for millennia to set space or time apart as sacred. In some Jewish synagogues, the cabinet holding the Torah scrolls is decorated by an eternal candle, never to be extinguished. Hanukkah is celebrated by nightly candle-lightings. Memorial candles are lit to remember the dead. Candles punctuate the Sabbath - in some Jewish communities, two candles lit on Friday evening signify this time each week to be slower, quieter, set apart, sacred.

In a similar way, Christians commemorate sacred time with candles. During Advent, we light a new candle each week in our wreaths to prepare for the celebration of Jesus' incarnation. As early as the sixth century, Christians have been lighting Paschal candles, or Easter candles, to celebrate Christ's resurrection and to point to the light of life triumphing over darkness and death. The Paschal candle is lit in the middle of the night during the Easter Vigil and processed through the sanctuary while worshipers chant:

*The light of Christ.  
Thanks be to God.*

## RESPOND

In some traditions of Judaism, mourning is viewed as a discipline, one in which the mourner is not only allowed, but expected to be engaged. Jewish people in mourning "sit shiva": traditionally after the funeral, they return home to sit on low chairs for seven days. They light memorial candles in honor of their loved ones.

Please take a moment to mourn for Jesus by lighting a candle or tealight in his honor, and in honor of anyone or anything you are grieving today. As you light the candle, remember that death does not have the last word. Though we set Lent apart as a sacred time to remember Christ's sacrifice, we can look forward to the Paschal candle and toward the hope that though we die, we will yet live.

## PRAY

*The light of Christ.  
Thanks be to God.*

# STATION 8



AS YOU GO...



# BURY THE ALLELUIA

## READ

*Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. (John 19:38-42)*

## REFLECT

Lent is forty days long representing forty days Jesus spent in the desert to seek God's will. Then he taught, preached, and healed to show God's love. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, when we are marked by ashes because we came from dust and we return to dust. Lent ends with Palm Sunday, a parade with branches when Jesus came into Jerusalem on the first day of Holy Week. During Holy Week we remember the Last Supper, Jesus's death and then celebrate his resurrection at Easter.

In some church traditions, worshipers "bury the alleluia" after the Ash Wednesday service - literally, burying a decorated word in the ground or behind a high altar - or figuratively, refraining from saying "alleluia" until Easter Sunday. The Alleluia remains buried, hidden, or unsaid to remind us that the promise of God is forever, and that God is with us even when we can't see or feel God. It is a reminder that the journey with God and to God goes far beyond death...and resurrection is always possible even when it is hard to see.

## RESPOND

Write the word "Alleluia" on a piece of paper. Bury it outside, or hide it somewhere in your home. On Easter Sunday, recover the Alleluia in celebration that Christ has risen.

## PRAY

May God the Father, who does not despise the broken spirit, give to you a contrite heart. May Christ, who bore our sins in his body on the tree, heal you by his wounds. May the Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth, speak to you words of pardon and peace. May the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.