

February 22, 2023  
Tina Miller  
Ash Wednesday Service Description  
Beauty for Ashes

*To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes.*  
Isaiah 61:3

Imposition of ashes can be a deeply moving, sobering, and celebratory experience. The way through Lent toward Easter is the way of the cross. New life with Christ involves a daily surrendering of the old life. Ash Wednesday, the first step of this Lenten journey, invites us to acknowledge our mortality, our sinfulness, and the grace of Christ by the imposition of ashes.

Ashes are symbolic. They remind us that:

- God is immortal. We are God's mortal creation. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).
- We are sinners in need of a Savior: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23).
- We are responsible to repent, receive conversion to new life in Christ and live in accordance with our new life in Christ. There are two things involved with genuine repentance. (1) Dying of the old self and (2) coming to life anew. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6:3).

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin ([Rom 6:4-6](#)).

As Christians we live in freedom. **God offers** us the **beauty** of freedom through Christ's sacrifice **for** the **ashes** of sin and death. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2).

Ashes are a physical representation of a spiritual reality. They are a vivid and tangible symbol of our utter dependence upon the grace of God and the power of Christ's resurrection. The spreading of ashes on foreheads (or wrists) is a symbol of freedom through Christ.

#### **THE ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE WILL INCLUDE**

A prayer of confession  
Proclamation of forgiveness.  
Imposition of ashes and communion.  
Worship

Worshippers are not required to come forward to receive ashes, nor should the practice be seen as a way of displaying one's piety before others. Imposition of ashes is offered as a reminder to the worshiper that **God provided the beauty of Christ's love and forgiveness for the ashes of sin and old ways of living.**