

A Clean Heart

Renewed in Mercy

ASH WEDNESDAY, YEAR A

Though Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of our Lenten journey, we must remember that all long journeys begin not with the first step or rolling down the road, but with preparation.

REFERENCES

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Psalm 51:17

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

COLORS

Purple

Recently, my family and I had to be away from home for an extended period. So, in the midst of packing, I was also cleaning, trying to make sure that we didn't come home to any unwelcome smells or visitors. The morning we left, I loaded the dishwasher with the last of the dishes in the sink, pressed start, and then loaded my family into the car. What I didn't know (but would soon learn) is that when you leave clean dishes in an unopened dishwasher for two weeks, you come back to dishes covered in mold. Lots of vinegar and hot water later, all was well, but I learned something about preparation for long journeys that I won't soon forget.

Though Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of our Lenten journey, we must remember that all long journeys begin not with the first step or rolling down the road, but with preparation. Even though we go on this journey year after year, grace persistently invites us to experience it anew, to learn new things about how we prepare and begin Lent. Our series for Lent this year is titled "Renewed in Mercy," and throughout the worship planning notes, we will focus on this concept of "re-new," of making new again or re-encountering something as new again. The Zen Buddhist

tradition calls this beginner's mind, the practice of releasing expectations or preconceived notions and approaching both new and familiar people, events, and ideas with a fresh perspective. How might we imbue worship this Lenten season with a sense of a new encounter with God's mercy?

If your congregation is used to hearing or singing Psalm 51 a particular way every Ash Wednesday, consider changing it this year. Use a resource like *Psalms for All Seasons* to find a new setting of Psalm 51 that either your choir or your congregation can sing during the Proclamation of the Word. Invite those gathered into confession, emphasizing how divine mercy makes our confession possible. Remind them that, as Wesleyan Christians, we understand that to even recognize our need to confess is our response to the persistent work of God's grace in our lives. As you send people forth from the space, invite them to engage a spiritual practice of noticing and paying attention to where grace and mercy are at work in their lives and the lives of their neighbors. Remember that as we dismiss from the Ash Wednesday worship service, we are just beginning the Lenten journey. Use this service, then, as a time to prepare and set the stage for a season of repentance that is not just turning away from sin but turning toward God's renewing working in the world.

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