

Upper St. Croix Parish
Grantsburg: Central, Atlas, St. Croix Falls

March 4th, 2025
Ash (Tuesday) Service

*Please stand if you are able.

***PRELUDE**

Toni Koons

PRAYERS IN SILENCE

GREETING

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins.

God's mercy endures forever. Amen.

We Celebrate New Life in Christ

***CALL TO WORSHIP** **Responsive**

Call a solemn assembly; gather the people.

Let all inhabitants of the land tremble before God.

**God know all the secrets of our hearts
and is aware of all our ways.**

The day of God is coming; it is near,
a day of clouds, shadows, and gloom.

**God's judgments are blameless and sure,
and God's grace is sufficient for all our needs.**

Rend your hearts and not your garments;
come to God with fasting, weeping, and mourning.

**We will worship God in purity and genuine love,
seeking to be faithful to the best we know. Amen.**

***OPENING HYMN** *Spirit of the Living God* **UMH 393 (X2)**

OPENING PRAYER **Unison**

Meet us, O God, in the special observances of this Lenten season.
Discipline us, and put a new and right spirit within us. Bless our
corporate worship and our private devotions, that this may be a
time of self-examination and growth. We pray in Jesus' name.
Amen.

Proclamation of God's Word

***GOSPEL LESSON**

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

(In the Pew Bible, on pages 5-6 in the New Testament (NRSV).)

This is the word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION *"A Heart Turned Toward God"* **Pastor Jenny Lee**

We Respond to God's Word

PRAYER OF CONFESSION **Unison**

Merciful God, we cannot escape from our transgressions. We have
sinned against you and have done what is evil in your sight. We have
tried to cover up our wrongdoing and have exaggerated our role in
accomplishing good things. We seek to lay up treasures on earth,
while neglecting permanent values and selfless commitment to causes
greater than ourselves. Forgive us, we pray, and set us on a new
course. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Pastor Jenny Lee

In steadfast love God is merciful and gracious, sparing us from the
punishment we deserve and lifting us above the consequences of our sin.
God washes away all the stains of our past to create in us clean hearts and
a right spirit. We are reconciled to God! Let us rejoice in our salvation!
Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

THANKSGIVING OVER ASHES **Unison**

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. Grant
that these ashes may be to us a sign of our mortality and repentance,
so that we may remember that only by your gracious gift are we given
everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

March 4th, 2025

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Pastor Jenny Lee Ph.D.
Upper St. Croix Parish UMC



“A Heart Turned Toward God”

Yesterday, I took out palm leaves that we had kept from last year’s Palm Sunday and made ashes with them. I remember how fresh and beautiful the palm leaves were, but over time, they dried and crumbled into ashes. As I set fire to them, a Scripture verse came to mind:

“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

Yes, everything turns to dust, including human life, but the Word of God endures forever.

Tonight, we gather at the beginning of Lent—a season of repentance, reflection, and renewal. We come with ashes, a symbol of our mortality, a sign of our repentance, and a reminder of our dependence on God. We cannot live without God’s grace, not even for a moment.

In today’s Scripture, Jesus challenges us to examine our motives in practicing faith:

- Do we seek God’s approval, or do we hope to be noticed by others?
- Are we storing up treasures in heaven, or are we clinging to things that fade away?

In the Christian liturgical calendar, two seasons are represented by the color purple—Advent and Lent. Purple symbolizes a season of reflection, humility, and spiritual preparation. It is a royal color, signifying kingship. Yet, at the same time, purple is also a powerful color of sorrow and hope—it calls us to repentance while pointing us toward God’s grace and the promise of new life.

As you may know, Advent is the season of waiting for Christ’s coming—the beginning of the Christian journey each year. It is a time of repentance, renewal, waiting, hope, and expectation for a new day and a new year. Many of us make New Year’s resolutions, reflecting on the past year and preparing for what lies ahead.

However, as we enter the Lenten season, we often find ourselves breaking those resolutions. Is it only me? God knows our hearts, minds, and souls. And yet, God, in His mercy, gives us a second chance—to repent, renew, wait, and hope again.

Lent, from Ash Wednesday to Easter, is a call to self-examination and repentance. During this season, purple represents Jesus’ suffering and passion, reminding us of His journey to the cross. Ash Wednesday marks the first day of Lent—a 40-day season (excluding Sundays) that leads us to Holy Saturday. The word “Lent” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word “*lencten*,” meaning “spring.” It is a time of spiritual preparation for celebrating Easter. Many Christians fast or give up something as a way to repent and renew their spirit.

What About Fat Tuesday? Is it appropriate for Christians? Fat Tuesday is traditionally a day of indulgence—the last chance to enjoy food and festivities before the 40-day fast of Lent. Historically, it has been

a day of feasting, celebration, and sometimes excess. But as Christians, we are reminded that true joy is found not in indulgence but in surrendering our hearts to God.

On Ash Wednesday, we come before God with repentant hearts. The word repentance comes from the Greek word “*metanoia*,” meaning a change of mind or heart. Biblically, repentance is more than feeling sorry for wrongdoing—it involves turning away from sin and turning toward God. In other words, the Ash service calls us to stop harmful habits, reconcile with God, and seek restoration with others.

Jesus warns us in Matthew 6:1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.” The Pharisees loved to make a public display of their fasting, prayers, and giving. But their goal was not true devotion—it was human praise. Jesus reminds us that faith is not about performance but about relationship.

The Ash service calls us to authentic faith—one that is deeply personal and rooted in God’s presence.

- When we give, we do so in secret.
- When we pray, we enter a quiet place and speak to God.
- When we fast, we do so with a heart turned toward God—not to impress others, but to be transformed.

Jesus teaches that the true reward of faith is found in the quiet places—where only God sees.

Lent is a season of seeking God in the secret place. It is a time to declutter our souls, silence distractions, and cultivate intimacy with Christ.

Jesus concludes with a question that cuts to the heart: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21)

What do we treasure most? If our hearts are set on status, possessions, or human approval, we will always be restless. But if we treasure God’s kingdom—justice, mercy, and love—our hearts will find true peace.

Lent invites us to reorient our hearts toward eternal things. It calls us to store up treasures in heaven through acts of love, justice, and faithfulness.

As We Receive the Ashes Tonight, We Remember:

- We are dust, and to dust we shall return.
- We are sinners in need of grace.
- We are called to turn our hearts fully toward God.

Let this Lent be a season of deep transformation—not seeking the world’s approval, but drawing near to the presence of our Savior. May our fasting, praying, and giving be done not for show, but as a true offering of love to God. Let us return to the Lord with all our hearts.

Thanks be to God. Amen!