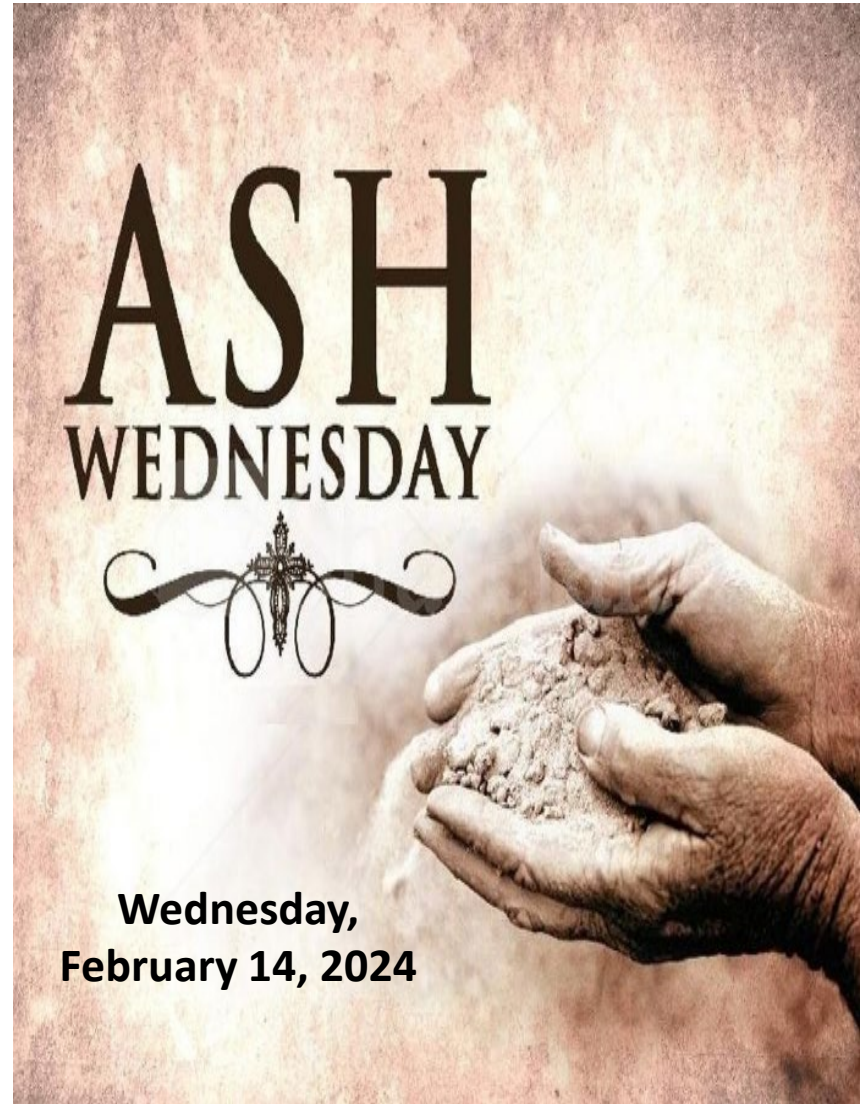


# ASH WEDNESDAY



**Wednesday,  
February 14, 2024**



# *A Time to Reflect*

Welcome to our interactive Ash Wednesday!

We have prayer stations set up in the sanctuary for you to follow in a counterclockwise direction. The first station begins to your right as you enter the main doors. Please follow the stations in order. If someone is currently at the next station, feel free to sit and reflect a little longer.

We have included instructions for the stations in this booklet as well as blank pages for you to journal or draw in response to the stations. Each of the stations explores a different aspect of ashes in the Bible: Loss, Mortality, Emptiness, Weakness, Trust God to meet you in this place.

## Notes and Thoughts:

### **Symbol 1 – Loss**

Ash is a symbol of loss. When you lose a loved one, you lay them in the ground and say goodbye. You know that their spirit has departed, and the body that remains will turn to dust. In the book of Genesis, after God makes the first man Adam from the dust of the ground, he tells him in **Genesis 3:19, “you will return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”**

Take a handful of dirt in your hand. Feel how coarse it is. Place the dirt back in the tray. Smooth over the dirt and reflect: Who or what did you lose this year that caused you grief? After a few moments of reflection, once you feel unhurried, proceed to the next station.

## Notes and Thoughts:

### **Symbol 2 – Mortality**

Ash is a symbol of mortality. Just as you remember your loved ones returning to dust, ash reminds you that you yourself will also return to dust. Like dirt beneath your feet, your mortality is ever-present. Crush the head of the flower in your hands over the box until it's a fine powder. **As you do, read the words from Isaiah 40:6-8: "All people are like grass... The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."**

Place the crushed flower in the box and reflect: What one emotion are you feeling right now as you reflect on your own mortality? After a few moments of reflection, place the stem on the table and proceed to the next station.

## Notes and Thoughts:

### **Symbol 3 – Emptiness**

Ash is a symbol of emptiness. We set our hearts on things to fill the void we feel within. Take the piece of charcoal and hold it in your hand. The charcoal you hold in your hand is burned organic matter. Something you could once eat to live has been consumed and coal is all that remains. There are things in life that promise to satisfy you. But the satisfaction anything on this side of heaven can bring you is temporary. Afterwards, despite what you've consumed, you're still hungry for more and the charcoal that remains cannot nourish you. **Read the words of Lamentation 4:5: "Those who feasted on delicacies perish in the streets; those who were brought up in purple now embrace ash..."**

Hold the charcoal tightly in your hand and reflect: As you think about the empty things you have chased after, what does the piece of charcoal represent for you? After a few moments of reflection, place the charcoal on the plate and proceed to the next station.

## Symbol 4 – Weakness

Ash is a symbol of weakness. No matter how powerful or beautiful an object may be, when it is burned its power is consumed. Pick up a match. Strike it and watch it closely as it dies. Once it's spent, rub the cool, burnt end between your fingers and look at the soot on your fingertips. See how the match is now completely spent. An object once full of potential power is now powerless and weak. Place the spent match in the dish.

**Read the words of 2 Corinthians 12:10:**  
**“For the sake of Christ, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”**

Reflect: Where in your life do you feel as powerless as this spent match? After a few moments of reflection, place the spent match in the dish and proceed to the next station.

## Notes and Thoughts:

## Symbol 5 – Repentance

## Notes and Thoughts:

Ash is a symbol of repentance. Throughout Scripture, when people are made aware of their sin, one of the ways they respond is to cover themselves in ash to demonstrate the humility of their repentance. Pick up the chalk and chalkboard. No one else will see what you write. In temporary chalk, write down the words or a symbol of your sins that break God's heart. Read the words to yourself. Notice how eager you are to remove them. Using your hand, rub the words off of the chalkboard. Your hands are now covered in the dust of repentance. **Read the words of Job 42:6: "I am in dust and ashes to show my repentance."**

Reflect: What emotion do you feel as your hands are covered in the dust of repentance? After a few moments of reflection, put the chalk and chalkboard down and proceed to the next station.

## Symbol 6 – Cleansing

## Notes and Thoughts:

You've experienced six of the symbols of ash: loss, mortality, emptiness, weakness, repentance, and shame. But there is a seventh symbol of ash. In ancient times, when ash was combined with oils, ash became a cleansing agent: Soap. Ash is a symbol of purification. Hold the bar of ash soap in your hand. **Read the words of Numbers 19:17-18a: "For the unclean they shall take some ashes of the burnt purification offering, and running water shall be added in a vessel; then a clean person shall take hyssop, dip it in the water, and sprinkle it..."**

Put the soap down and pick up a wet wipe. Clean your hands and throw away the wet wipe and read aloud the words of Hebrews 9:14: How much more, will the love of Christ... cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! Reflect: Your body reacts based upon how you feel. When you're lonely, you slouch. When you're anxious, your shoulders tighten. How does the peace that comes from God's forgiveness change your posture? Proceed to the final station.



## Symbol 7 – Guilt

## Notes and Thoughts:

Ash is a symbol of guilt. Like a child who hides when their parent catches them breaking the rules, people throughout Scripture covered themselves in ash when they felt remorse because of their sin.

**Read the words of Genesis 18:27: “Then Abraham spoke again. ‘Since I have begun, let me speak further to my Lord, even though I am but dust and ashes.’”**

When you are ready, approach the station to receive the symbol of ashes on your forehead. You may request the typical symbol of a cross, or in honor of Valentine’s Day and the unconditional love of Jesus, you may request a heart shape. As you leave, know that God—Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer—continues to breathe life into your mortal body, filling you with indescribable love, the peace of forgiveness, and hope for a future filled with possibilities.