

DYING HIS DEATH LIVING HIS LIFE

SERVICE FOR ASH WEDNESDAY



FRED NIEDNER

DYING HIS DEATH **LIVING** HIS LIFE

SERVICE FOR ASH WEDNESDAY

**DYING TO SIN,
LIVING IN FORGIVENESS**

NEWSLETTER NOTICE

Join us for Dying His Death, Living His Life, a special worship series for Lent, starting on Ash Wednesday, as we remember that Christ enables us to daily die to our sins to live a new life in him.

BULLETIN NOTICE

In this service for Ash Wednesday, we remember that Christ enables us to daily die to our sins to live a new life in him.

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COMPLETE SCRIPT FOR WORSHIP LEADERS

- If desired, an **Environmental Projection** is shown on a screen or on the walls of your worship space to set the tone for the service before the service begins or throughout the service at various points:

[shutterstock.com/image-photo/cross-ashes-on-dark-wood-background-2251694803](https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/cross-ashes-on-dark-wood-background-2251694803)

- This **Theme Verse** is read aloud by the pastor at the start of the service or is read silently by the congregation before the service begins:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Psalm 51:1

- The **Opening Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the tune Aberystwyth 77 77 D, or a selection from the contemporary music song suggestions list at the end of the music guide for this service can be sung instead:

Savior, when in dust to thee
 Low we bow the adoring knee;
 When, repentant, to the skies
 Scarce we lift our weeping eyes;
 O, by all thy pains and woe
 Suffered once for us below,
 Bending from thy throne on high,
 Hear our penitential cry!

By thy helpless infant years,
 By thy life of want and tears,
 By thy days of deep distress
 In the savage wilderness,
 By the dread, mysterious hour
 Of the insulting tempter's pow'r,
 Turn, O turn a fav'ring eye;
 Hear our penitential cry!

By thine hour of dire despair,
 By thine agony of prayer,
 By the cross, the nail, the thorn,
 Piercing spear, and torturing scorn,
 By the gloom that veiled the skies
 O'er the dreadful sacrifice,
 Listen to our humble sigh;
 Hear our penitential cry!

By thy deep expiring groan,
 By the sad sepulchral stone,
 By the vault whose dark abode
 Held in vain the rising God,
 O, from earth to heav'n restored,
 Mighty, reascended Lord,
 Bending from thy throne on high,
 Hear our penitential cry!

- The **Confession and Absolution** are spoken responsively by the pastor and the congregation:

P In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. David the psalmist writes, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Psalm 32:1). In humble repentance, we seek the blessing of God and forgiveness for our sins.

C **Almighty God, we confess that we have turned away from your Word and from your will for our lives. Instead of following your ways, we listen to the temptations of the world around us and seek to live according to our own sinful desires. We do not love others as we should. Have mercy on us, and forgive our sins for Jesus’ sake. Create in us new hearts and willing spirits to glorify you and serve others in your name.**

P The psalmist writes, “I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my sins to the Lord,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5). God has had mercy on us, sending his Son to suffer the penalty of death that we deserved for our sins and forgiving us for Jesus’ sake. I announce to you that your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

C **Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!**

- The **Prayer of the Day** is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

P Lord Jesus, today we begin the season of Lent and receive the mark of ashes, a reminder that we are sinners who need you, our Savior. We will follow in your steps as you take up your path to the cross. Lead us in the power of the Holy Spirit to walk in love as you walked. It was love that led you to die on the cross for our sins. It is love that leads us to serve as you served and to forgive as we have been forgiven. Hear our prayer and accept our grateful praise, dear Savior. Amen.

- The **Imposition of Ashes** takes place at this time, introduced by the pastor. The assembly may come forward to receive the imposition of ashes after the introduction:

P Confronted by his own sin and by the majesty of God, the Old Testament prophet Job said, “I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6). To put dust and ashes on one’s head was a sign of humility and repentance, remembering the penalty of death for sin that was decreed by God in Eden: “You are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). Today on Ash Wednesday, we remember that we are sinners and that we need the Savior. Having confessed our sins, we rejoice in God’s forgiveness, granted to us for Jesus’ sake. The mark of ashes is made in the sign of a cross, remembering that on the cross Jesus took onto himself the penalty of death that we deserved for our sins.

You are invited to come forward at the direction of the ushers to receive the mark of ashes.

- After or during the Imposition of Ashes, this **Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the tune Munich 76 76 D, or a selection from the contemporary music song suggestions list at the end of the music guide for this service can be sung instead:

I lay my sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all and frees us from the accursed load.
I bring my guilt to Jesus to wash my crimson stains
Clean in his blood most precious till not a spot remains.

I lay my wants on Jesus; all fullness dwells in him;
He heals all my diseases; my soul he does redeem.
I lay my griefs on Jesus, my burdens and my cares;
He from them all releases; he all my sorrows shares.

I rest my soul on Jesus, this weary soul of mine;
His right hand me embraces; I on his breast recline.
I love the name of Jesus, Immanuel, Christ the Lord;
Like fragrance on the breezes his name abroad is poured.

- The **Children's Sermon** is delivered by the pastor or other worship leader:

Needed: small chalkboard or whiteboard, chalk or dry erase marker or paper tablet and felt pen

- P** We are going to start with a few math problems. Do you think you will know the answers? I'll write the problem, and you can tell me the answer. What is the answer to this problem? (*Begin with simple math problems such as $2 + 2$, then add more difficult problems, according to the ages of the children. Write different numbers to compare, and ask which number is greater.*) Let's try another math question that comes from our Gospel lesson. It's a math problem from Jesus! (*Write the number 77 and the number 7.*) Which of these numbers is greater? (*Let children answer.*) The answer is 77. That is more than 7. Jesus used a math question like that to teach a lesson about forgiving people.

The disciple Peter asked Jesus, "If my brother sins against me, how often should I forgive him? If he sins seven times, should I forgive him seven times?" Peter might have thought that was enough forgiveness! When his brother hurt him or teased him or took something from him, did he have to keep forgiving him? Seven times may have seemed like too many times to forgive! But Jesus answered, "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times." Jesus did not mean that we should count up to 77 and then stop forgiving others. We should never keep a count of how many times others have hurt us or said unkind things. Jesus wants us to forgive others like God forgives us. Jesus died on the cross for us, to take away our sins. When we say we are sorry for our sins, God forgives us, and he never keeps a count! He does not stop forgiving. He wants us to forgive others and to forgive a lot more than 77 times!

Let's pray: Jesus, you died on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven. Help us to forgive others like you forgive us. Amen.

- The **Old Testament Reading**, Psalm 51:1-12, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

- The **Epistle Reading**, Colossians 1:13-20, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

- The **Gospel Reading**, Matthew 18:21-35, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that

same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

- The **Sermon Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the tune *Meinen Jesum Lass’ Ich Nicht* [Darmstadt] 78 78 77, or a selection from the contemporary music song suggestions list at the end of the music guide for this service can be sung instead:

Jesus sinners doth receive; oh, may all this saying ponder
Who in sin’s delusions live and from God and heaven wander!
Here is hope for all who grieve: Jesus sinners doth receive.

We deserve but grief and shame, yet his words, rich grace revealing,
Pardon, peace and life proclaim; here our ills have perfect healing..
Firmly in these words believe: Jesus sinners doth receive.

- The **Sermon** is delivered by the pastor:

¶ We have come again to the day of ashes that marks the beginning of Lent, our annual forty-day sojourn in the wilderness with Jesus. It is a time of testing and facing temptation and of remembering that most certainly we are dust, and to dust we shall return. In these days we take up disciplines that countless generations of Christians have practiced—covert almsgiving, quiet fasting and praying to our Father who sees and hears in secret. For two millennia, people new to our number have prepared for baptism during this time, looking toward the day of being buried with Christ by baptism into his death. Lent is also a season of repentance, cleansing, turning around and reorienting ourselves, casting out idols that have set up shop in our hearts and minds, throwing ourselves on God’s mercy and seeking forgiveness for all that has gone wrong within us and all the damage we have visited on those around us.

We’re dying, as the ashes on our faces remind us. During this season we remind ourselves that death is not only inevitable, it’s necessary. We must die. Only by dying do we ever leave behind forever such things as our general cursedness, our mistrust of God, our capacity to hold grudges, our selfishness and greed, the secret arrogance that convinces us we’re right about everything, our capacity to dehumanize and judge others and our dread of all that might kill us. Together, we shall practice dying to all that stuff, in the here and now, over and over. Daily

dying is baptismal living. And we'll start with dying to sin.

Given the pervasiveness of sin in this world, ours and everyone else's, forgiveness in many ways turns out to be our life's work no matter our occupation or station in life. It is difficult, demanding work, the sort that never seems finished. The longer we live, the better we understand the truth of what prophets like Desmond Tutu taught when he declared, "There is no future without forgiveness." Without forgiveness, we are stuck forever in the bitter, festering, paralyzing mire of the past with all its regrets and resentments. We cannot be free to love our neighbors or ourselves unless by some miracle we can forgive.

Our lessons today teach us more about forgiveness. From ancient King David we learn the language of contrition. With the aid of his words, we bare our hearts and souls and all our shameful secrets. We hide nothing and beg for mercy. For good reason, we sing this psalm of David often in our circles so these words get carved into the core of our being and they're ready for us when we need them. And we need them often.

Jesus' parable in our gospel lesson teaches something else essential to the lifelong work of living in forgiveness, and a hard lesson it is. Hard enough to break us. To get to the core of it, skip to the last line: If you don't forgive your brother or sister from your heart, your heavenly Father to whom you pray for forgiveness will hand you over to be tortured until you pay off all your own debts. We heard that message, and then the lector declared this, "The gospel of the Lord." Ha! If that's good news, we'd hate to hear the bad! We heard correctly, however. Earlier in Matthew's gospel, when teaching what we call the "Our Father" prayer, which says, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us," Jesus adds a note at the end:

"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (6:14-15).

That's a hard word indeed, and frightening. If there's no forgiveness for being unforgiving, we're in deep trouble. Goodness knows we've tried to forgive—even in cases when we've surely been sinned against. It often seems we've succeeded. We're no longer thinking about what they did to us. We no longer obsess over it, daydreaming in the shower, when we could be starting our day thinking of poetry or our beloved, but instead imagining the cutting, righteously damning words we might say to them when we finally get our chance. It's all gone. Over and done. We've moved on. And then someone says the wrong thing. There's a repeat of the same old insult, and once again our mind and heart are tuned to the vengeance channel.

We're goners, apparently, ready for the heavenly Father's prison—solitary confinement no doubt—and yes, the torture chamber.

As a resource for handling our unforgiving-ness problem, the parable we heard today only makes us see that we're even more pathetic than we've already realized. The details of Jesus'

Tune..... Aberystwyth 77 77 D

First system of musical notation, measures 1-8. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The music is written for piano in treble and bass staves. Measure numbers 1 and 9 are indicated at the start of the staves.

Second system of musical notation, measures 9-16. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The music is written for piano in treble and bass staves. Measure numbers 9 and 17 are indicated at the start of the staves.

Third system of musical notation, measures 17-24. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The music is written for piano in treble and bass staves. Measure numbers 17 and 18 are indicated at the start of the staves.

Fourth system of musical notation, measures 25-32. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The music is written for piano in treble and bass staves. Measure numbers 25 and 26 are indicated at the start of the staves.

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 Bending from thy throne on high,
 Hear our penitential cry!

By thy helpless infant years,
 By thy life of want and tears,
 By thy days of deep distress
 In the savage wilderness,
 By the dread, mysterious hour
 Of the insulting tempter's pow'r,
 Turn, O turn a fav'ring eye;
 Hear our penitential cry!

By thine hour of dire despair,
 By thine agony of prayer,
 By the cross, the nail, the thorn,
 Piercing spear, and torturing scorn,
 By the gloom that veiled the skies
 O'er the dreadful sacrifice,
 Listen to our humble sigh;
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By thy deep expiring groan,
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 Held in vain the rising God,
 O, from earth to heav'n restored,
 Mighty, reascended Lord,
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CONTEMPORARY MUSIC SONG SUGGESTIONS

- The following song suggestions can be used for a more contemporary worship service in place of the more traditional hymns included in this kit. Rights to use these songs in the service must be purchased by your parish through CCLI or other copyright licensing agencies.

“My Savior, My God” by Aaron Shust and Dorthy Greenwell

“Dying to Live” by Stephen Curtis Chapman

“The Wonderful Cross” by Chris Tomlin, Isaac Watts, J. D. Walt, Jesse Reeves and Lowell Mason

“Forgiveness” by Matthew West

“Trading My Sorrows” by Darrell Evans

“His Mercy Is More” by Matt Boswell and Matt Papa