

SOUTHWOOD UNITED CHURCH DEVOTIONAL SERIES
LENT 2026 – YEAR A – WEEK of Ash Wednesday

Wednesday, February 18

Reading: Joel 2:1–2, Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand - a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.

Thought: Today is the start of the season of Lent which leads up to Good Friday and Easter Sunday. As I read today's Bible verse I was reminded that "God's" Friday can be considered the day of the Lord and is certainly a day of darkness and gloom, clouds, and blackness. Lent is traditionally a time of contemplation and simplicity and a time of repentance and of seeking reconciliation with God. These are all weighty topics. Entering into the season of Lent asks us to be serious about our faith journey, where we are going and how to be all that God intends us to do and be. Where are you on your faith journey?

Prayer: Friend Jesus – I seek to walk with you on this faith journey through the season of Lent. Be with me and guide my steps.

Thursday, February 19

Reading: Joel 2:12-13 "Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Thought: Such a call from a prophet living thousands of years ago. God still calls and waits for us. No matter where we are in our faith journey, no matter what sins we have committed, God is always ready and waiting for us to return. Returning to God requires a commitment to true repentance. God looks beyond our surface regrets and remorse, the rending of our garments, and looks deep into our hearts. What relief there is to truly and profoundly confess all that separates us from God and receive God's grace and compassion. Are you ready to open your heart and show everything to God?

Prayer: Compassionate God – I confess that I have not always acted and thought the way that you wish me to. Forgive me and extend your grace.

Friday, February 20

Reading: Psalm 51:1-4 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict

Thought: This reading brought something to my attention I had not really considered before. When I do wrong or act in a way that is hurtful to someone, I am actually sinning against God as well. It struck me that my sin not only separates me from God, my sin, whoever it was directed towards, that sin hurts God. I had not thought of this before. It is important to be accountable for our actions, realizing when we have done wrong, and doing our best to repair any damage. We have been created to be in right relationship with others and with God. Perhaps next time to apologize to someone you will also apologize to God. Have you ever apologized to God for your actions that have hurt someone else?

Prayer: Merciful God – I apologize for all the times I have hurt you. Forgive me and help me to make amends.

Saturday, February 21

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Thought: Matthew 28:19-20 contains the "Great Commission" where the followers of Jesus are instructed to go out and spread the good news of the resurrection. In this way we are ambassadors of Jesus – representing him and God as well. To do this, at least in my mind, it is necessary to be reconciled to God. I know this does not mean I need to be perfect – that of course is impossible. No, the word reconciliation carries with it a connotation of being submissive, of being resolved and reunited. When we submit to God we acknowledge that God's way is the "good" way. When we yield ourselves to God, seeking to obey and confessing when we fail, then and only then can we be an ambassador of Christ, illustrating the way of true life and the blessings it brings.

Prayer: Loving God – I have confessed my sins and wish to be reconciled with you. Help me to live the life you wish for me, and in doing so bring your light to those in darkness.

Complete Lectionary Readings for the week of Ash Wednesday February 18

Joel 2:1–2, Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sound the alarm on my holy hill.

Let all who live in the land tremble,
for the day of the LORD is coming.

It is close at hand—

² a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and blackness.

Like dawn spreading across the mountains
a large and mighty army comes,
such as never was in ancient times
nor ever will be in ages to come

Joel 12–17 **Rend Your Heart**

¹² “Even now,” declares the LORD,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting and weeping and mourning.”

¹³ Rend your heart
and not your garments.

Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love,
and he relents from sending calamity.

¹⁴ Who knows? He may turn and relent
and leave behind a blessing—
grain offerings and drink offerings
for the LORD your God.

¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion,
declare a holy fast,
call a sacred assembly.

¹⁶ Gather the people,
consecrate the assembly;
bring together the elders,
gather the children,
those nursing at the breast.

Let the bridegroom leave his room
and the bride her chamber.

¹⁷ Let the priests, who minister before the LORD,
weep between the portico and the altar.

Let them say, “Spare your people, LORD.
Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn,
a byword among the nations.

Why should they say among the peoples,
‘Where is their God

or Isaiah 58:1–12 **rue Fasting**

58 “Shout it aloud, do not hold back.
Raise your voice like a trumpet.

Declare to my people their rebellion
and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.

² For day after day they seek me out;
they seem eager to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that does what is right
and has not forsaken the commands of its God.
They ask me for just decisions
and seem eager for God to come near them.

³ 'Why have we fasted,' they say,
'and you have not seen it?
Why have we humbled ourselves,
and you have not noticed?'
"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please
and exploit all your workers.

⁴ Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
and in striking each other with wicked fists.
You cannot fast as you do today
and expect your voice to be heard on high.

⁵ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for people to humble themselves?
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?

⁶ "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

⁸ Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness^[a] will go before you,
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.
"If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.

¹¹ The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.

¹² Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;

you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings

Psalms 51:1–17

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
- ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
- ⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
- ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.
- ¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
- ¹⁵ Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- ¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
- ¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is^[a] a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise

Corinthians 5:20b–6:10 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10

²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin^[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6 As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ²For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you."^[b]

I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

Paul's Hardships

³We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. ⁴Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; ⁵in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; ⁶in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; ⁷in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; ⁸through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; ⁹known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; ¹⁰sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything

Matthew 6:1–6, **Giving to the Needy**

6 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Prayer

⁵"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 6:16–21 **Fasting** "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Treasures in Heaven

¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also