



*Return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing.*
- Joel 2:13

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church
Ash Wednesday – February 18, 2026
420 Beaver St., PO Box 411
Mars, PA 16046-0411
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Phone: 724-625-1830 email: office@stjohnchurchmars.org
Rev. Katie McNeal, Presiding Minister
Maizy Fisher, Director of Music Ministries

*We are delighted to have you worship with us this morning!
Know that you are welcome here just as you are.*

If you are looking for a church to call home, why not consider making this one your own? If this is your first time worshiping at St. John, please fill out the visitor information card stapled to your bulletin.

*Everything you need to follow worship can be found in this bulletin. As you are comfortable, please rise when there is an * and join in the congregational responses, noted in **bold**. All songs are marked with numbers. The red book in the pew has all the songs. Look for the large number in the upper corner of the page to find the correct song.*

*During the time of **Peace**, you are invited to turn to those around you and offer a word of peace. We suggest a handshake and saying, “Peace be with you.” You are also welcomed to offer another gesture of peace (wave, fist-bump, smile, etc.). Hand sanitizer is available in each pew.*

*At the time of **Offering**, you are invited to share a gift. Envelopes are available in the pews if you prefer. Online gifts may be made using the QR code below:*



*You may also offer updates to our ongoing prayer list using the yellow cards in the pews and placing them in the offering plates. **Visitor information cards** and member attendance cards (attached to the front of the bulletin) may also be placed in the offering plates.*

*As Lutherans, we believe Christ is truly present in the elements of the Lord’s Supper. At the time of **Holy Communion**, all baptized individuals are welcome to come forward via the center aisle, receive the elements, and return via the side aisles. We begin at the front of the right side, commune all on the right side, then we will invite the left side forward. When you come forward, you may receive the bread from the pastor (gluten free wafers are available), then pre-filled cups with wine or grape juice from the assisting minister. You may consume the elements after receiving them then place the empty cup in the tray held by the acolyte. Those who do not receive Holy Communion are welcome to come forward for a blessing.*

*If you need a **restroom**, restrooms are located on the bottom floor at the far side of the building from the elevator. Restrooms may be accessed either via the stairs in the rear of the sanctuary, the stairs by the Greeting Area, or the elevator.*

*A **playroom** is available downstairs for children who need a break from the worship service. This room is by the elevator on the lower level. An adult must remain with the child. Children are also welcome to utilize the books and puzzles available in the Greeting Area on the top level by the elevator.*

As you prepare for worship, you are invited to fill out the blue prayer request forms located in each pew. The cards will be collected during our hymn of the day, and prayers will be offered during the prayers of intercession.

PRELUDE

ANNOUNCEMENTS

*WORDS OF WELCOME

Friends in Christ,
today with the whole church
we enter the time of remembering Jesus' passover from death to life,
and our life in Christ is renewed.

I invite you, therefore, to the discipline of Lent—
self-examination and repentance,
prayer and fasting,
sacrificial giving and works of love—
strengthened by the gifts of word and sacrament.
Today, we begin our journey through these forty days,
a journey that we will continue until the great Three Days of Jesus' death and resurrection.

*GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And also with you.

*PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray,
Almighty and ever-living God, you hate nothing you have made, and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and honest hearts, so that, truly repenting of our sins, we may receive from you, the God of all mercy, full pardon and forgiveness through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

FIRST READING: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

A reading from the book of Joel.

¹Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sound the alarm on my holy mountain!

Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near—

²a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!

Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes;
their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them
in ages to come.

¹²Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

¹³rend your hearts and not your clothing.

Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

¹⁴Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God?

¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly;

¹⁶gather the people.

Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged;
gather the children, even infants at the breast.

Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy.

¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep.

Let them say, “Spare your people, O LORD,
and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations.

Why should it be said among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’ ”

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 51:1-17

Read responsively.

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your ¹ steadfast love;
in your great compassion blot out ¹ my offenses.

**²Wash me through and through ¹ from my wickedness,
and cleanse me ¹ from my sin.**

³For I know ¹ my offenses,
and my sin is ev- ¹ er before me.

**⁴Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil ¹ in your sight;
so you are justified when you speak and right ¹ in your judgment.**

⁵Indeed, I was born ¹ steeped in wickedness,
a sinner from my ¹ mother's womb.

**⁶Indeed, you delight in truth ¹ deep within me,
and would have me know wisdom ¹ deep within.**

⁷Remove my sins with hyssop, and I ¹ shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be pur- ¹ er than snow.

**⁸Let me hear ¹ joy and gladness;
that the body you have broken ¹ may rejoice.**

⁹Hide your face ¹ from my sins,
and blot out ¹ all my wickedness.

**¹⁰Create in me a clean ¹ heart, O God,
and renew a right spir- ¹ it within me.**

¹¹Cast me not away ¹ from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spir- ¹ it from me.

**¹²Restore to me the joy of ¹ your salvation
and sustain me with your boun- ¹ tiful Spirit.**

¹³Let me teach your ways ¹ to offenders,
and sinners shall be re- ¹ stored to you.

**¹⁴Rescue me from bloodshed, O God of ¹ my salvation,
and my tongue shall sing ¹ of your righteousness.**

¹⁵O Lord, o- ¹ pen my lips,
and my mouth shall pro- ¹ claim your praise.

**¹⁶For you take no delight in sacrifice, or ¹ I would give it.
You are not pleased ¹ with burnt offering.**

¹⁷The sacrifice of God is a ¹ troubled spirit;
a troubled and broken heart, O God, you will ¹ not despise.

SECOND READING: 2 Corinthians 5:20b--6:10

A reading from the book of 2 Corinthians.

^{20b}We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{6:1}As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says,

“At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

***GOSPEL READING: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

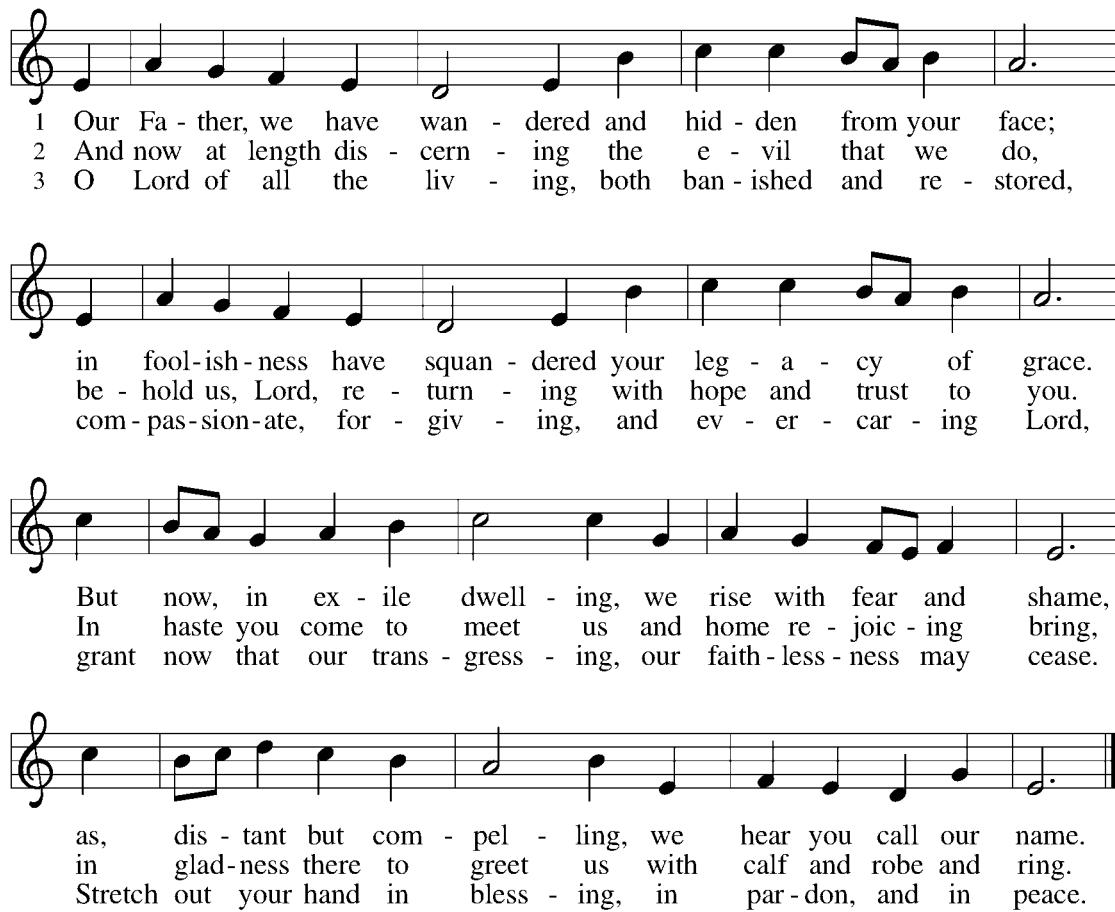
¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ

SERMON

*HYMN OF THE DAY *Our Father, We Have Wandered* (ELW 606)



1 Our Fa - ther, we have wan - dered and hid - den from your face;
2 And now at length dis - cern - ing the e - vil that we do,
3 O Lord of all the liv - ing, both ban - ished and re - stored,

in fool-ish-ness have squan - dered your leg - a - cy of grace.
be - hold us, Lord, re - turn - ing with hope and trust to you.
com - pas - sion - ate, for - giv - ing, and ev - er - car - ing Lord,

But now, in ex - ile dwell - ing, we rise with fear and shame,
In haste you come to meet us and home re - joic - ing bring,
grant now that our trans - gress - ing, our faith - less - ness may cease.

as, dis - tant but com - pel - ling, we hear you call our name.
in glad-ness there to greet us with calf and robe and ring.
Stretch out your hand in bless - ing, in par - don, and in peace.

INVITATION TO LENT

We begin this holy season
by acknowledging our need for repentance
and for God's mercy.

We are created to experience joy in communion with God,
to love one another,
and to live in harmony with creation.

But our sinful rebellion separates us from God, our neighbors, and creation,
so that we do not enjoy the life our creator intended.

As disciples of Jesus,
we are called to a discipline that contends against evil
and resists whatever leads us away from love of God and neighbor.

CONFESSiON OF SIN

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Most holy and merciful God,
we confess to you and to one another,
and before the whole company of heaven,
that we have sinned by our fault,
by our own fault, by our own most grievous fault,
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven.

Have mercy on us, O God.

We have shut our ears to your call to serve as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our past unfaithfulness, the pride, envy, hypocrisy, and apathy that have infected our lives, we confess to you.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people, we confess to you.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to share the faith that is in us, we confess to you.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our neglect of human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty, we confess to you.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our false judgments, our uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us, we confess to you.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us, we confess to you.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Restore us, O God, and let your anger depart from us.

Hear us, O God, for your mercy is great.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

Almighty God,

you have created us out of the dust of the earth.

May these ashes be a sign of our mortality and penitence,
reminding us that only by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ are we given eternal life;
through the same Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Those who wish may come forward to receive ashes while hearing the words:

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

HYMN DURING THE IMPOSITION: *Jesus, Remember Me* (ELW 616)



Je - sus, re - mem - ber me when you come in - to your king - dom.



Je - sus, re - mem - ber me when you come in - to your king - dom.

After those who desire ashes have received them, please stand as you are able.

Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation,
that we may show forth your glory in the world.

By the cross and passion of your Son, our Savior,
bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ,
strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life.
Amen.

***APOSTLES' CREED**

With the whole church, let us confess our faith.

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;

he ascended into heaven,

he is seated at the right hand of the Father,

and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.



***PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Sustained by God's abundant mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of creation.
A brief silence

O Lord, our God, you gather your church and call us to return to you. Accompany us throughout our Lenten pilgrimage. Create in us clean hearts and renew all the baptized to declare your praise. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Renew your creation, O God. Bring rains to parched places and heal lands affected by a changing climate, so that all inhabitants of the earth experience your abundance. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Renew the nations, O God. Give voice to those on the margins and resolve to world leaders who seek to protect those most vulnerable. Loosen the bonds of injustice and bring an end to all violence, oppression, and persecution. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Renew your people, O God. Respond to those who cry out to you in secret or in seclusion. Equip us with compassion to care for those who experience homelessness, food insecurity, economic hardship, and illness, especially Geneva, Cherry, Winnie, Henry, Harry, Sally, Debi, Anne, Karen, Nan, Beverly, those on our prayer list, all whom we remember aloud or in our hearts and all who suffer in any way. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Renew this congregation, O God. Inspire our faith formation ministries and those who teach and lead. Invigorate us with lifelong curiosity and wonder as we grow as your disciples. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

O Lord, our God, we give thanks for all your faithful ones of every time and place. Renew us by the example of their lives of prayer and service, and at the last, bring us with them into your everlasting presence. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your steadfast love and your promise to renew your whole creation; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

***SHARING THE PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.
And also with you.

OFFERING

OFFERTORY HYMN *Restore in Us, O God* (ELW 328)

*Rise on 4th verse



1 Re - store in us, O God, the splen - dor of your love; re -
2 O Spir - it, wake in us the won - der of your pow'r; from
3 Bring us, O Christ, to share the full - ness of your joy; bap -
4 Three-per - soned God, ful - fill the prom - ise of your grace, that



new your im - age in our hearts, and all our sins re - move.
fruit-less fear un - furl our lives like spring-time bud and flow'r.
tize us in the ris - en life that death can - not de - stroy.
we, when all our search-ing ends, may see you face to face.

*OFFERING PRAYER

God of good gifts,
receive these and all our offerings
as we present them in faithful service
for the sake of your gospel.

Prepare our hearts to receive you in this meal
as you pour out your very presence
through Christ Jesus, the wellspring of eternal life.

Amen.

*GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

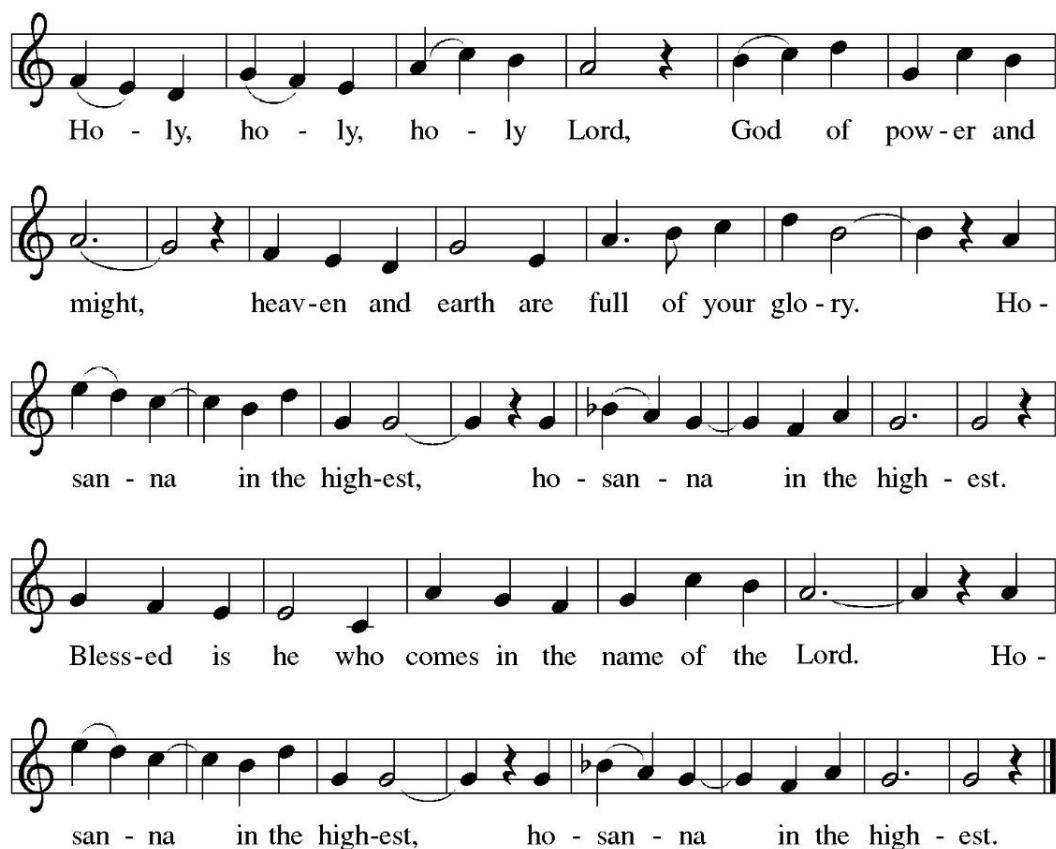
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Savior Jesus Christ.

You call your people to cleanse their hearts
and prepare with joy for the paschal feast,
that, renewed in the gift of baptism,
we may come to the fullness of your grace.

And so, with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow-er and
might, heav-en and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho -

san - na in the high-est, ho - san - na in the high - est.

Bless-ed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Ho -

san - na in the high-est, ho - san - na in the high - est.

Blessed are you, O God of the universe. Your mercy is everlasting and your faithfulness is with us through all times.

Praise to you for creating the heavens and the earth.

Praise to you for saving the earth from the waters of the flood.

Praise to you for bringing the Israelites safely through the sea.

Praise to you for leading your people through the wilderness to the land of milk and honey.

Praise to you for your Spirit poured out on all nations.

Praise to you for the words and deeds of Jesus, your anointed one.

Praise to you for the death and resurrection of Christ.

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

With this bread and cup we remember our Lord's passover from death to life
as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.

O God of resurrection and new life:

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine.

Bless this feast. Grace our table with your presence.

Come, Holy Spirit.

Come, Holy Spirit.

Reveal yourself to us in the breaking of the bread.

Raise us up as the body of Christ for the world.

Breathe new life into us. Send us forth, burning with justice, peace, and love.

Come, Holy Spirit.

Come, Holy Spirit.

With your holy ones of all times and places,
with the earth and all its creatures,
with sun and moon and stars,
we praise you, O God, blessed and holy Trinity, now and forever.

Amen.

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen

*INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Come and receive Jesus, our strength in the wilderness.

Through this meal, we know forgiveness, life, and salvation as the blessings of God's sacramental grace. In response to Jesus' invitation, all are welcome to come forward and experience the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine. Those who do not receive the bread and wine are invited to come forward for a blessing.

Grape juice and gluten free wafers are available upon request. Communion may also be brought back to the pews for those who are unable to come forward.

COMMUNION SONG *Lamb of God*

Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world; have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world; have mer - cy on us.

Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN *Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling* (ELW 608)



1 Soft - ly and ten - der - ly Je - sus is call - ing, call - ing for
2 Why should we tar - ry when Je - sus is plead - ing, plead - ing for
3 Oh, for the won - der - ful love he has prom - ised, prom - ised for



you and for me. See, on the por - tals he's wait-ing and watch-ing,
you and for me? Why should we lin - ger and heed not his mer - cies,
you and for me! Though we have sinned, he has mer - cy and par - don,

Refrain



watch-ing for you and for me.
mer - cies for you and for me? "Come home, come home!
par - don for you and for me.



You who are wea - ry, come home." Ear - nest-ly, ten - der - ly,



Je - sus is call - ing, call - ing, "O sin - ner, come home!"

*POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

Embody God, at your table, we have tasted the goodness of Jesus.
With the eyes of our hearts open to your promise,
empower us to hear the needs of our neighbors
and touch the world with your love.

Amen.

*BLESSING

God, the giver of love,
☩ Christ, the resurrection and the life,
and the Holy Spirit of rebirth
bless you in this Lenten journey.

Amen.

*SENDING SONG *God, Who Made the Earth and Heaven* (ELW 564)



1 God, who made the earth and heav-en, dark - ness and light:
2 And when morn a - gain shall call us to run life's way,
3 Guard us wak-ing, guard us sleep-ing, and, when we die,
4 Ho - ly Fa - ther, throned in heav-en, all - ho - ly Son,



you the day for work have giv - en, for rest the night.
may we still, what - e'er be - fall us, your will o - bey.
may we in your might - y keep-ing all peace - ful lie.
Ho - ly Spir - it, free - ly giv - en, blest Three in One:



May your an - gel guards de - fend us, slum-ber sweet your mer - cy send us,
From the pow'r of e - vil hide us, in the nar - row path - way guide us,
When the last dread call shall wake us, then, O Lord, do not for - sake us,
grant us grace, we now im - plore you, till we lay our crowns be - fore you



ho - ly dreams and hopes at - tend us all through the night.
nev - er be your smile de - nied us all through the day.
but to reign in glo - ry take us with you on high.
and in wor - thier strains a - dore you while a - ges run.

*DISMISSAL

Go forth into the world to serve God with gladness; be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good; render no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people; and love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Go in peace. Serve in love.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

Today's Music

Our Father, We Have Wandered. Text: Kevin Nichols, 1929-2006, Music: Hans Leo Hassler; arr. J S Bach, Public Domain.

Jesus Remember Me. Text: Luke 23:42; Taizé Community, Music: Jacques Berthier, 1923-1994. GIA Publications, Inc.

Restore in Us, O God. Text: Carl P. Daw Jr., b. 1944, Music: Hal H. Hopson, b. 1933. Hope Publishing Company (ASCAP).

Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling. Text: Will L. Thompson, 1847-1909, Music: Will L. Thompson. Public Domain.

God, Who Made the Earth and Heaven. Text: Reginald Heber, 1783-1826, st. 1, alt.; William Mercer, 1811-1873, sts. 2, 4, alt.; Richard Whately, st. 3, alt., Music: Welsh traditional; arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958. Public Domain / Oxford University Press (New York).

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