

Advent Barn Stations



ASH WEDNESDAY

*Sensory Stations to Guide You
Through Ash Wednesday*

**THE IMPOSITION OF ASHES
TO PREPARE US FOR LENT**



WELCOME TO ASH WEDNESDAY BARN STATIONS

A SENSORY PROCESS TO HELP US UNDERSTAND, EXPERIENCE,
AND PARTICIPATE IN THE SEASON CALLED LENT.

WHAT ARE BARN STATIONS?

BarnStations are a style of event we do several times a year to take us through the process of something: Lent and Good Friday, the process of mourning and death, Advent; and we use tactile stations to help our whole selves to go through the journey.

Today is the high holy day called Ash Wednesday; an event that is the most attended experience of any non-Sunday service. Often done in a manner that allows a small space of solace in a chaotic weekday world, our Ash Wednesday Barn Stations are meant to allow you to explore the depth of this holy day and take meaningful time to reflect on the profound experiences of ashes and dust.

WHAT IS ASH WEDNESDAY?

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. For many centuries, Lent has been a season of intentional fasting, reflection, and preparation for Easter. Sometime around the 7th century, church leaders wanted the Lenten experience to include a full forty days of fasting to replicate the pattern of forty days found in the flood, the Exodus, and Jesus' journey through the wilderness. Ash Wednesday offered that extension and gave a very tactile way to enter into the solemn season.

The ashes of Ash Wednesday - which are typically a result of last year's palm branches - signify both death and repentance; the darkness of the world and our mortality as human beings. They offer a tangible focus on the dust-ness of life and a physical marker of our participation in God's work in the world.

Ash Wednesday is heavily influenced by the Jewish rhythms of seasons of fasting and reconciliation. These were often marked by confession and repentance - of grieving the difficulty of the world, the disconnection of our existence, and setting the standard for living more fully so as to build the best world possible. These Jewish traditions were usually done with simplicity, barrenness, and a solemn atmosphere that often included the wearing of sackcloth and ashes.

As Ash Wednesday became the formal, liturgical beginning of Lent, Christians relied on their Jewish heritage and used this time as an invitation to recognize our humanity; to remember who we are and who we are becoming in a dark and difficult world. Beginning the season of Lent with this focus offers a profound catalyst to the embrace of resurrection and God's revolution of the world. Certainly, acknowledging our dust-ness and reflecting on God's dream for creation is a great way to begin transformation.

Before Spring comes Winter; before light comes darkness; and before resurrection, there is death.

May we join the faithful who, over centuries, have begun this work of making us people of Easter, people of hope, and people of God's Kingdom by beginning here. If we do, the world just may never be the same again.

HOW WILL THIS WORK?

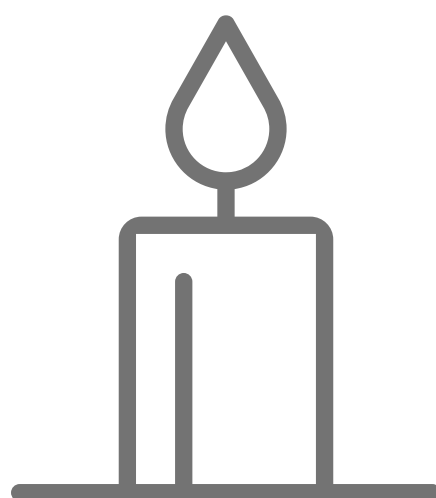
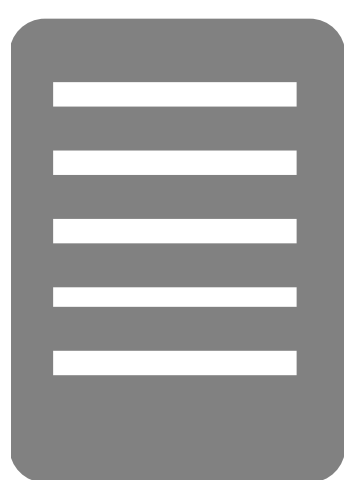
There will be various texts to portray a specific component of Ash Wednesday and Lent, culminating with the imposition of ashes and communion. Accompanying each text is a reflection with a tangible act for you to do, if you choose. The aim is to engage as many senses as possible so that you don't just experience Ash Wednesday with your mind, but also with your hands.

If you would like to do the reflective actions at home, here are some suggested materials you may need:

ITEMS NEEDED FOR DOING THE STATIONS AT HOME:

- A candle and incense:
 - To help create a meditative atmosphere and engage your olfactory senses. You'll also need a way to extinguish and re-light the candle.
- For Station 1:
 - Two notecards or pieces of paper and writing utensil.
- For Station 2:
 - Your notecards from Station 1 (or separate pieces if you don't want to destroy those).
 - A candle and fire-safe container (metal bowl, ceramic bowl)
- For Station 3:
 - Ashes (for the sake of convenience at home, these can be from almost anything. Traditionally, the ashes come from last year's palm branches. If you can't manage that, you could even use the ashes produced from Station 2).
 - Oil to mix with the ashes to make them adhere better.
- For Station 4:
 - A small cup of juice and a piece of bread.

Traditionally, the atmosphere of Ash Wednesday is very simplistic and dark. Greyscale colors are the norm and coarse materials such as canvas imbue themselves throughout the room.



PREPARATION

PLEASE BEGIN BY FINDING A SPACE TO SIT & REFLECT
BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE STATIONS, WE INVITE YOU TO SIT IN SILENCE.

Give yourself permission to breathe for a few minutes.
Take multiple long and deep breaths,
notice how the space feels,
hear the sounds of the room.

And transition yourself from wherever you were today
to where you are now.



BARN STATION PROCESS

IF YOU ARE IN THE BARN:

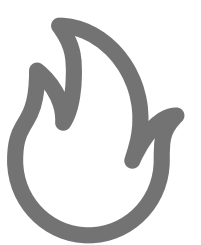
AROUND THE ROOM ARE FOUR STATIONS THAT WILL TAKE YOU THROUGH THE JOURNEY OF ASH WEDNESDAY.

Each station will have a piece of paper with a text and an explanation of a sensory action to help you engage with and be transformed by that part of the experience.

PLEASE BEGIN WITH **STATION I** AND WORK YOUR WAY TO **STATION IV**.

You may go through the stations as many times as you would like and, when you are finished, feel free to sit in the space for as much time as you need.

*Please maintain a spirit of somberness and silence
in respect for the sacredness of this space
and for those in prayer or meditation.*

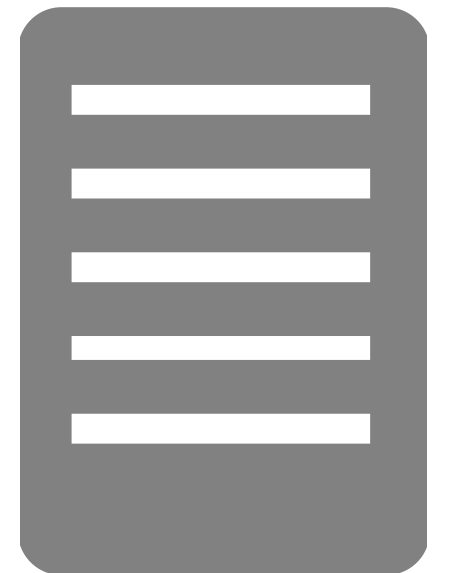


STATION I: MIRROR

A PATRIARCH OF THE EARLY CHURCH, ST. BASIL OF TURKEY, OFFERS ONE OF THE BEST REFLECTIONS ON THE SEASON OF LENT THAT HELPS CAPTURE OUR DISPOSITION FOR THE WEEKS TO COME.

He compares the human journey to that of a sailor on a ship. When a ship comes to a strong tempest of a storm, the sailors willingly abandon any objects that will impede their survival. To ensure the ship will not sink, anything that burdens their buoyancy is done away with. All of their accumulation is jettisoned.

Basil goes on to say that if sailors know how to ensure such vitality, we should certainly embody the same posture to our lives. We often accumulate materiality and behaviors that are actually to our own detriment. We create our own storms. We fail to put our lives and the world in the best position possible to live at our best and help grow a world that reflects God's peace and wholeness. How much more, then, should we be willing to abandon such burdens?



LENT IS, THEREFORE, AN INVITATION TO GO THROUGH THE DIFFICULT, DEMANDING PROCESS OF CHANGE.

We have embedded into our yearly rhythm an opportunity to pay attention to the various cargo that might be holding us and the world back. Just as Israel, when they were prepared to cross the Jordan river into their new land, was invited to release the items and pieces of their identity that needed to be different and pay attention to the aspects of their corporate life that needed to continue to grow - we, in Lent, are invited to do the same. What needs to be different and what needs to be nurtured?

What in our lives and in the world is not the way of Jesus and the life of God?

Or, as St. Basil said:

"YOU ARE DUST.
AND TO DUST, YOU WILL RETURN.

BEFORE YOUR SHIP SINKS, JETTISON THE CARGO YOU SHOULD HAVE NEVER ACCUMULATED.

JETTISON EVIL AND REPLACE IT WITH COMPASSION. JETTISON GLUTTONY TO THE STOMACHS OF THE POOR. TEAR DOWN YOUR WALL TO MAKE ROOM FOR THE STRANGER.

LET YOUR FAST PRODUCE UNMISTAKABLY CRUCIFORM ACTION.

THEN YOU WILL SEE YOUR LIFE AND THE WORLD EXCHANGE TUMULT AND STORM FOR CALM."



STATION I RESPONSE

TAKE TWO NOTECARDS

ON THE FIRST NOTECARD, WRITE OUT ALL THAT HAS GONE WRONG.

What are things you want to let go of? What are things you wish you had done differently? What in your life and in the world is not how it should be? This is the art of confession; of naming the realities and behaviors of your life that need to be different as you look toward the transformation of resurrection.

ON THE SECOND NOTECARD, WRITE OUT ALL THAT IS GOOD, BEAUTIFUL, AND TRUE.

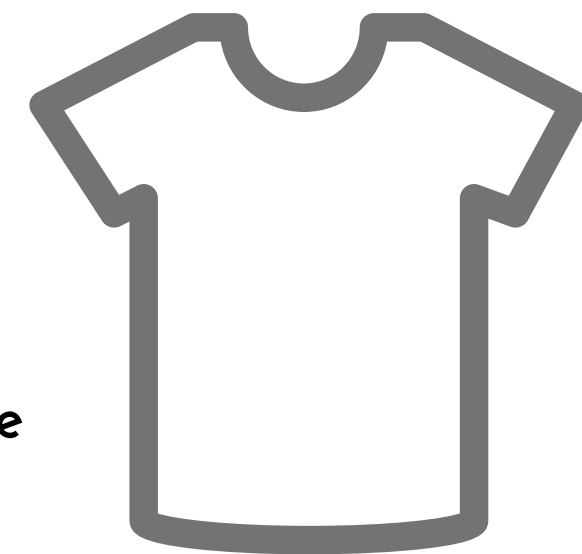
This can be purely about your life, but it can also include the rightness you see in the world. Often, it's easy for us to focus on the junk. We must be diligent to celebrate the beauty. Where have you thrived? Pay attention to the goodness in the world; because our invitation is to nurture what is flourishing so that it continues to grow.

These cards, then, act as a mirror for where you are now. Peer into them and let them catalyze an imagination for the life that is still to protrude from the dust of your soul.

(Take these cards with you to the next station)

STATION II: RENDING

IN THE WEARING OF SACKCLOTH AND ASHES,
A COMMON EXPRESSION OF ONE'S DESTITUTE LONGING IS TO REND THE CLOTHING; TO TEAR IT.



Typically, this is done in moments of overwhelming grief and loss. However, this action is also associated with penance. Called a "keriah," the rending of clothing is a tactile substitute for anger and is referred to as "exposing the heart." The posture of this action is applicable to the sentiment of Ash Wednesday.

As we grapple with our own mortality and as we reflect on a world of death and darkness, there is much mourning to be done. Especially as we acknowledge the death and darkness in and around us - all of the ways our lives and the world are not okay - we are invited to respond. Because the rending of clothing is also a way to mark the end of something.

**HERE, AS WE BEGIN LENT, WE BELIEVE THAT BY THE CROSS, GOD DESTROYED DEATH
AND BY JESUS' RISING, GOD IS MAKING ALL THINGS NEW.**

We, then, are on the journey of rising from the ashes of the present to the world unleashed in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Once we have named our present reality, we let go of it.

And, in letting go, we make space for a new world to emerge in the midst of this one.

STATION II RESPONSE

**TAKE YOUR CARDS, HOLD THEM UP, AND TEAR THEM IN TWO.
(PLEASE FEEL FREE TO USE SEPARATE CARDS IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO REMEMBER WHAT YOU WROTE).**

Then, as the ultimate act of extinguishing, place your cards in the fire and allow them to become ashes in the cauldron. Acknowledge the present, but then let it go. But also be aware that the present is not gone, it has just changed shape. As our stories continue, we carry the bits and pieces that have made us who we are. But though they are with us, they do not need to define us. History might describe the past, but it does not define the future. Let the pain, grief, failure, and weight become ashes, making way for a new you and a new world.

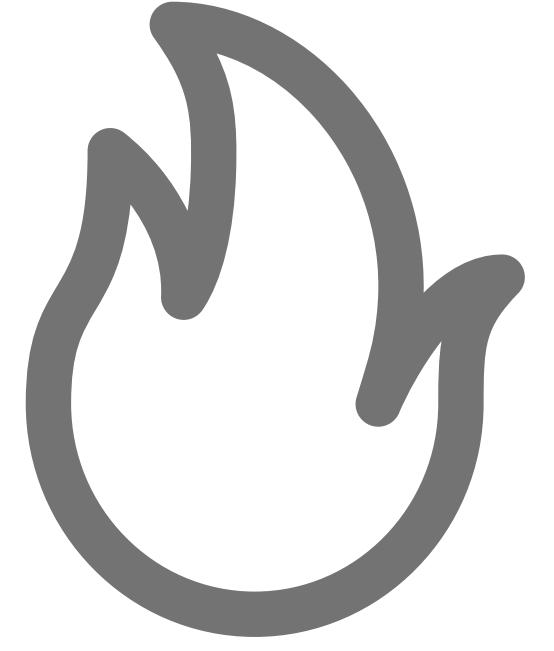
As you watch your cards become ashes, begin reflecting on the dust-ness of your life. You are mortal. You, too, are dust.

And before you depart this station, light a votive candle to display the illuminating trajectory of your soul to all else who will be embarking on this experience after you. Because, just as you are dust, so is everyone else. We will endure this difficult journey best when we travel alongside of another.

STATION III: ASHES

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS JUST DUST.

GENESIS PORTRAYS THAT CREATION ALL ARISES OUT OF THE SAME PRIMORDIAL MATERIAL. IT IS NOT UNTIL GOD'S BREATH, SPIRIT, AND WIND – THE HEBREW WORD "RUACH" – ENTERS INTO THE DUST THAT IT BECOMES ANIMATED AS LIFE.



The Bible reminds us that it is from dust that we have life.

We are a smattering of earth's material infused with divine life.

That's what it means to be a human being - dust made alive.

So much of life in our culture is an attempt to transcend death. Throughout every age, people have hoped to be more than we are. Genesis reminds us that our lives are fragile, held together in being only by the Divine.

HOW NICE IS IT TO HAVE A DAY WHERE WE FACE THE REALITY THAT WE ARE NO MORE THAN THE SMEAR OF ASHES ON OUR FOREHEADS?

And how enlightening can this day to be realize that it isn't just you? We are all dust, together.

The ashes before you are a reminder of what we are and what we aren't. They are a reminder of our fragility, they are a reminder of our limits, and they are a reminder of our messiness. But they are also a reminder of our dependence on the source of life; which is also not us.

Yet, the ashes are also a reminder that everyone, including you, is quite literally the same. Despite appearances and behaviors; despite the perceived celebrity status of the supposed "powerful" and the potential dehumanization of those we think are worse than us - these ashes remind us that we are all just dust.

Our lives are not our own.

And our lives are not as different as we proclaim.

Today, embrace that you are dust and to dust, you shall return.

Because it is in our dust-ness, together, that the Creator of the world can make something beautiful.

STATION III RESPONSE

TAKE A CONTAINER OF ASHES, PLACE YOUR THUMB IN THE ASHES, AND SPREAD THE ASHES ON YOUR FOREHEAD.

IT IS TRADITIONAL TO MAKE THE SHAPE OF A CROSS.

Also, feel free to have someone with you place the ashes for you. A staff member is available if you would like them to safely do the imposition of ashes.

STATION IV: TABLE

LET US BEGIN WITH THIS PRAYER:

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 penitence, so that we may remember that only by your gracious gift are we given life. May you continue to breathe into us your life and be that which carries us into the restoration of all things.



Amen.

OUR INVITATION ON THIS ASH WEDNESDAY AS WE BEGIN LENT IS TO ALLOW THE GRACIOUS PRESENCE OF GOD TO PULL US INTO REDEMPTION. WE END, THEREFORE, WITH THE SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION.

May this bread and this cup be a sign for you of the work God has done, of the grace that makes your fragile life possible, and of the work we believe God is still unfolding in creation.

Receive this gift of life.

But also affirm that in being given this gift, we are called to embody it as living beings who will be broken and poured in the pattern of Messiah. We, as dust, are healed by Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. But Jesus' work will only continue through us, in our dust-ness, continuing to reflect this cruciform pattern of living to the world and restoring the image of God in us and in all creation.

As St. Basil said:

LET YOUR FAST PRODUCE UNMISTAKABLY CRUCIFORM ACTION.

Let us be broken and poured for the healing of the world.

And let us, in embodying this story, show the world that death and darkness do not have the last word.

STATION IV RESPONSE

TAKE THE BREAD AND THE CUP AND HEAR THIS GOOD NEWS:

DYING, CHRIST DESTROYED DEATH. RISING, CHRIST RESTORED LIFE. AS WE, BEING DUST, EMBODY THE LIFE AND BREATH OF GOD, SO WE WILL CONTINUE TO OVERCOME DEATH AND BRING NEW LIFE TO OURSELVES AND TO THE WORLD.

This is the body of Christ, broken; and the blood of Christ poured out for the healing of the world.

Receive these elements and may the world never be the same because in receiving Jesus' body and blood, it shall come to define your body and your blood.

A FINAL PRAYER

AS YOU DEPART THIS HOLY SPACE,
MAY THIS PRAYER DEFINE YOUR JOURNEY:

“You are not lost.

You are here.

Stop abandoning yourself. Stop repeating this myth about love and success that will land in your lap or evade you forever. Build a humble, flawed life from the rubble, and cherish that.

There is nothing more glorious on the face of the earth than someone who refuses to give up, who refuses to give in to their most self-hating, discouraged, disillusioned self, and instead learns, slowly and painfully, how to relish the feeling of building a hut in the middle of the suffocating dust.”

On this Ash Wednesday, may you see that you are not lost.

You are here.

And that’s exactly where we need you to be.

