

Church *in a* Bag

March 2022



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In the deserts of this world
may you find **signs** of God.
In the wilderness of your lives
may you be **encouraged** by God.
In your joy and in your sorrow
may you **rejoice** in God.

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Wednesday 2 March

Gathering

We are called to set our direction towards the cross and beyond. This is the nature of repentance. To turn from our sinful way and to turn to Christ. The use of Ashes is a sign of our mortality. From dust we come and to dust we return.

Prayer

Lamb of God you take away the sin of the world

Have mercy on us

Lamb of God you take away the sin of the world

Have mercy on us

Lamb of God you take away the sin of the world

Grant us your peace.



Preparation

Ash Wednesday Service is when the church prepares its members for the season of Lent to better appreciate the death and resurrection of Christ. Some of the practices of Christians throughout the centuries is to use this time for healthy self-examination, and repentance from our sins. It is used as a time for prayer, or for

those who are disciplined it's the Service that leads into a time of fasting, and self-denial in order to focus strongly on our Christian faith and how we live that out as individuals and as a part of our community.

The most familiar Ash Wednesday observance is the ash crosses worn on the foreheads of many churchgoers. In the book of Daniel (550 BC) in the 9th chapter there's a line about associating fasting with ashes. In the 5th century BC, after Jonah's preaching of conversion and repentance, the town of Ninevah proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, and the king covered himself with sackcloth and sat in the ashes (Jonah 3:5-6). So ashes are associated with penance, which is the dominant theme for the time of Lent. All the rituals surrounding the start of Lent are ways to connect the physical body to spiritual life. The practise of this once a year is an organic way if you like, of drawing our faith into their lives.

Jesus Himself also referred to ashes. Referring to towns that refused to repent of sin although they had witnessed the miracles

and heard the good news, our Lord said, "If the miracles worked in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, they would have reformed in sackcloth and ashes long ago" (Matthew 11:21).

In our present liturgy for Ash Wednesday, we use ashes. The Minister blesses the ashes and imposes them on the foreheads of the faithful, making the sign of the cross and saying, "Remember, people, from dust you came, and unto dust you shalt return" (Genesis 3:19). Besides showing sorrow for one's sins, those who honour Ash Wednesday add an additional meaning; the need to prepare for a holy encounter.

Reading

Matthew 6:1-6,
16-21



Reflection

Lent is one of the oldest observations on the Christian calendar. As we begin this holy season of Lent for 2022 in preparation for Easter, we must remember the significance of the ashes we have received: we mourn and do penance for our sins. We again convert our hearts to the Lord, who suffered, died,

and rose for our salvation. We renew the promises made at our baptism when we died to an old life and rose to a new life with Christ. Finally mindful that the kingdom of this world passes away, we strive to live the kingdom of God now and look forward to its fulfillment in Heaven. Below are some questions you may ask yourself to turn toward, make ready the celebration of Easter and the rising and resurrection of Christ into our lives.

- Stop. Look around. Where are you?
- Where are you at in your life? Where are you at with your God?
- Where are you? Here. Now.
- Take stock. Are you facing forward? Or back? Are you looking inward? Or out toward the world? Where are you looking?
- Time is unstoppable, unavoidable, inevitable, inescapable. The days pass. Now is gone before it can be grasped. Where are you?
- Where are you at in your life? Where are you at with your God? What do you need to work on within yourself?

A song to sing or read

My song is love unknown

My song is love unknown
my saviour's love for me
love to the loveless shown
that they might lovely be
but who am I, that for my sake
my Lord should take frail flesh and
die?

He came from heaven's throne
salvation to bestow
but they refused, and none
the longed-for Christ would know
this is my friend, my friend indeed
who at my need his life did spend.

Sometimes they crowd his way
and his sweet praises sing
resounding all the day
hosannas to their king
then 'crucify' is all their breath
and for his death they thirst and
cry.

Why, what has my Lord done
to cause this rage and spite?
he made the lame to run
and gave the blind their sight.
What injuries! Yet these are why
the Lord most high so cruelly dies.

They rise and they must have
my dear Lord done away

a murderer they save
the prince of life they slay!
Yet willingly, to shame he goes
that he his foes, from this, might
free.

Here might I stay and sing
of him my soul adores
never was love, dear King
never was grief like yours!
This is my friend in whose sweet
praise
I all my days could gladly spend.

Music and lyrics in the Public Domain.

A Closing Prayer

O Lord, you have searched me and
known me. You know when I sit
down and when I rise up; you
discern my thoughts from far
away. You search out my path and
my lying down and are acquainted
with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my
tongue, O Lord, you know it
completely.

You hem me in, behind and
before, and lay your hand upon
me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful
for me; it is so high that I cannot
attain it.

Search me, O God, and know my
heart; test me and know my
thoughts.

See if there is any wicked way in
me and lead me in the way
everlasting.
In the name of Jesus Christ.

May the God of love and grace
keep you safe.
May the God of comfort and
healing hold you close.
May the God of peace and joy fill
your heart.

Amen

*Thanks to Rev Mel Graham
for preparing today's reflection
and prayers.*



Sunday 6 March

A Gathering

As we, the gathered but physically separated people come together, let us find a candle and light it as a reminder that our darkened world is lit by the love and the light of Christ. As we gather, let us remember and acknowledge that wherever we are we worship on the lands of the Aboriginal people of Australia, and we honour them and their elders, past, present, and emerging.

Preparation

Let's think about what it means to be tempted: how easy it is to give in to a politician, a captain of industry, the head of a media empire or just you and me. We are ordinary citizens trying to make our way as best we can in a world of seemingly endless troubles, high uncertainty, and betrayal by those we trusted to lead us. The world into which Jesus was born was a world where corruption, greed and the lust for power were rampant. All overshadowed by the fear of an oppressive, ruthless foreign power.

Readings

Psalm 91 9-16

Luke 4:1-13

Reflection

When we are faced with temptation, do we come face to face and argue with the physical presence of Satan, monstrous, horned, winged (he was after all a fallen angel), cloven hoofed, evil personified? Or are we, as human beings, struggling with our own innate humanity?



From the Beginning as thinking, reasoning human beings, we have been faced with choice. We all come to that fork in the road when we face a choice. So, can we think of Jesus, not as the glorious Son of God, but as an ordinary person, an undistinguished carpenter from an obscure town in a despised province in a minor country over-run by a pagan enemy? He has just had that revelation in the water of the Jordan, and has gone to an isolated place to think, what next? Where do I go? What do I do now? How do I do it?

As happens often in his ministry he retreats into semi-isolation – into a wilderness for forty days. Where the wilderness was located, we do not know. The wilderness was not a blazing, barren desert. It was a place of pasture where shepherds grazed sheep. In Jewish thought it was not a hostile place where demons and wild animals roamed, but a place of hope and new beginnings.

As the Children of Israel had been tested for forty years in the wilderness, now Jesus faced his temptation; came face to face with the challenge of his own humanity.

He was very well read in the Scriptures, in the Law and the Prophets. All the temptations he faced came from those Scriptures. If, as had been revealed at the Jordan he was the Son of God, then could he not break his fast and turn stones into bread? The answer came from Deuteronomy 8:3: “There is more to life than bread”. As the Son of God, as the Messiah, could he not seek power and glory? The answer is found in Deuteronomy 6:13: service to God comes first and last. But the real temptation came from the word of God in Psalm 91:9-16 as the justification for his first miracle – defying death. And again, the response came from Deuteronomy 6:16.

What that last temptation demonstrates is that we too can use the Scriptures to justify our choices as we face that fork in the road: for our own satisfaction, our own glorification, our own lust for power; for our decision to walk the hard road, following in the footsteps of that obscure man from nowhere important who faced everything the world could throw at him. Jesus never assumed any authority but what was given him as God, who in the light of the ways of the world, did everything wrong.



Asong to sing or read
Praise to you, O Christ our Saviour
Refrain

Praise to you O Christ our Saviour
Word of the Father
calling us to light.
Son of God who leads us to
freedom
Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

You are the word who calls us out
of darkness

You are the word who leads us
into light
You are the word who brings us
through the desert

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Refrain

You are the one whom prophets
hoped and longed for
You are the one who speaks to us
today

You are the one who leads us to
our future

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Refrain

You are the Word who calls us to
be servants

You are the Word whose only law
is love

You are the Word-made-flesh who
lives among us

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Refrain

You are the Word who binds us
and unites us

You are the Word who calls us to
be one

You are the Word who teaches us
forgiveness

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Refrain

*Music and Lyrics by Bernadette Farrell
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[Here's a link](#) to listen and sing
along with Praise to you, O Christ
our Saviour.

Closing Prayer

O Lord God you led your people
through the wilderness
and brought them to the Promised
Land.

Guide us now so that, following
your Son we may walk safely
through the wilderness of this
world toward the life you alone
can give.

So we may walk safely in this
world you have given us to care
for, among the people you have
called us to minister to.

Through Jesus Christ, our Saviour
and Lord, who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

Amen

*Thanks to Shirley Colless
for preparing today's reflection
and prayers.*



Sunday 13 March

A Gathering

COME ALL!

Come, ready or not
to the Lord.

Amen



A song to sing or read

Ready or Not

Verse 1

Come now as you are
Or as you want to be
Are you ready
Are you ready
Come now tired broken
Scared or just in need
Ready or not it's alright
Take your time
If nothing else just come

Tag

Are you ready

Are you ready

Verse 2

Come now bring your hopes
Your dreams your doubts your
scars
Are you ready
Are you ready
Come now bring your hurts
Your fears your faith your heart
Are you ready
Are you ready or not

Chorus 1

There's no place like His presence
There's no time like the now
Ev'ry one two or three of us
Count Him in here and now
He welcomes the broken
He's alright with your past
He's not mad at any one of us
But He waits with open arms
Says come

Verse 3

Come now leave your inhibitions
At the door
Are you ready
Are you ready
Come now lay your burdens down
He's got them all
Are you ready
Are you ready or not

Chorus 2

He's still faithful to deliver
Mighty as ever to save
He's still good on His promises
And His love still never fails
He's not moved by perfection
Or how well we look the part
But He's wild about the hidden
stuff
Like He's wild about the heart

Verse 4

Come now for all we've seen
We ain't seen nothing yet
Are you ready
Are you ready
Come now
bring Him
praise
For what He
might do
next
Are you ready
Are you ready or not



Chorus 3

He's already bought our freedom
He's already paid our debt
He's already done the miracle
He's already conquered death
He's our light and salvation
He's our rock-solid hope
He's already done enough for us
He's already doing more

Chorus 4

He's already seen the ending
He's already seen us through
He's already breaking out in us
He's already on the move
He's already won our battles
He's already paved the way
He's already gone ahead of us
And He is ready when we are

Verse 5

Come now for all we've seen
We ain't seen nothing yet
Are you ready
Are you ready
Come now bring Him praise
For what He's gonna do next
Are you ready
Are you ready or not
Come

*Words and music by Joel Houston and Marty
Sampson*

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[Here's a link](#) to Ready or Not if
you'd like to sing along.

Preparation

Come to the Word, reach out to
the scriptures
Read Isaiah 50:4-9
Read Psalm 70
Read Hebrews 12:1-3
Read John 13:21-52

Reflection

Ponder Isaiah 50: 4-9: When was a time you followed the Lord's instruction?

Ponder Psalm 70: How often do you really ask God for help when you need it?

Ponder Hebrews 12:1-3: When have you pioneered in something? How ready did you feel for the task? What was your hope in keeping on going?

Ponder John 13:21-52: Think of a time it's been hard to follow Jesus. It's ok if it's hard to remember such a time. Sometimes those are the moments we want to forget or deny. Instead, remember it and pray with Jesus about it. What does he say?

Closing Prayer

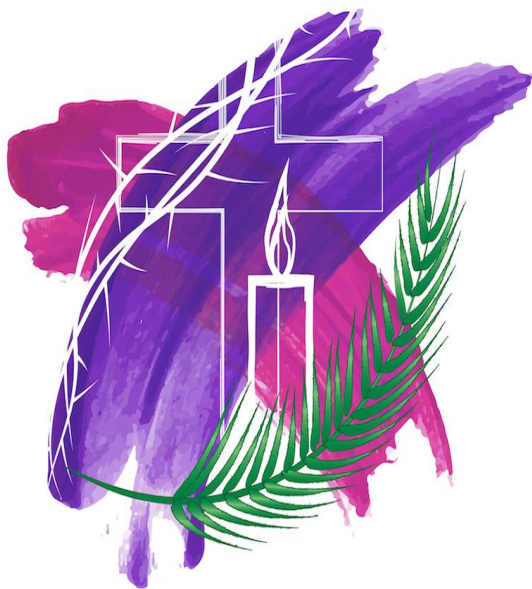
Dear Lord, when we ask to be sent, help us to be ready.
Open our ears to hear and bring wide our eyes to see;
So that we might join with you as your Spirit moves.
And our hearts be attuned to your instruction.

We ask for your abundant grace to be continually poured out in Dubbo,
Especially on those who need it, who've never known it before, felt it before, experienced it before.
Let us be a part of your work here, in your Name, for the benefit of all.

Thank you for the invitation to come to you and that you want us to come near to you. Help us when it gets hard, continue moving your hope through us to keep strong.

Amen

*Thanks to Meg McCloud
for preparing today's reflection
and prayers.*



Sunday 20 March

Gathering

Gentle Shepherd
we come to you as we are
not as we pretend to be.
The truth is, God
that when we lift our heads
above our path
we too often discover ourselves
lost in a maze of choices.
We confess often that we are lost.
Were it not for you

we would be
lost forever.

Gentle
Shepherd.
King of Love.
Lead us.
Amen



Preparation

A guard in charge of a lighthouse along a dangerous coast was given enough oil for one month and told to keep the light burning every night. One day a woman asked for oil so that her children could stay warm. Then a farmer came. His son needed oil for a lamp so he could read. Another needed some for an engine. The guard saw each as a worthy request and gave some oil to satisfy all. By the end

of the month, the tank in the lighthouse was dry.

That night the beacon was dark and three ships crashed on the rocks. More than one hundred lives were lost. The lighthouse attendant explained what he had done and why. But the prosecutor replied, "You were given only one task: to keep the light burning. Every other thing was secondary. You have no excuse."

There are always choices between good and evil, but perhaps a more subtle choice is conflict where one must choose between two good options. The lighthouse keeper in our story found himself in such a conflict situation. So, also are the would-be disciples in today's gospel story.

First Reading

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

"And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

Reflection

Albert had an oak tree outside his cabin that his son, Albert Jr., who had died in his twenties, had insisted on saving when the house was built. For years Albert tried to steer the tree away from the house so that it would not damage it. For a while he was successful, but as the tree grew thicker and taller, he was no longer able to control it. It kept coming closer and closer to the house, and when the wind blew, the main trunk began to sway and strike at the vital structure of the house.

That oak tree had much sentimental value, so Albert resolved that he would steer it away from the house at whatever cost. But each time, after a few months, the tension lines came loose or snapped and broke. Nature was too determined, too forceful. There was nothing he could do to control the tree and pull it away from the house. Prospects for the future seemed even worse. Within a few years, at



the rate it was growing, it would cause even more damage.

One day Albert made up his mind. The tree had to come down. As he cut its upper branches, then the lower ones and finally the trunk itself, it felt as if he was cutting his arms, legs and finally his own heart. He had cut the tree that Albert Jr. wanted so much to save. When the last section of the trunk fell to the ground Albert sat down and wept.

Decisions such as these are difficult. Yet decisions must be made, not based on what is evil and what is good, but based on what is good and what is better. Albert cut down the tree that his son loved. But, more important, he spared the house that he helped build and loved, too. When the day was over, he felt that it had been a good one. Though hurtful, he had made the right choice. Many of our decisions are painful because we are faced with choosing between what is good and what is better. Yet we must make them.

**Biblical illustration
from Rev James S Hewett**

Second Reading

Luke 13:1-9

"A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none."

Reflection

I am very much a hit and miss vegetable gardener; I certainly get a lot of mis-hits, for sure. Every year I hope so much more of my garden efforts. However, for all my composting, numerous infant seedlings, free seeding and watering, my crops are far from bountiful or even half responsive to giving something back for my input. More than once I ended the summer season ready to pull out everything, break up the garden bed boxing, and spread out the accumulated soil onto the house yard lawn. Next year rolls around and there I am again determined to get even better from that to which I put my figurative heart and soul.

The Gospel reading today is about another garden crop - figs. Jesus told a story about a

farmer who came every year to look for figs on the tree, but there weren't any. So, the farmer told the gardener to cut the tree down. But the gardener asked the farmer to give it another chance for another year.

During that year the gardener would take special care of the tree so that maybe it would produce fruit for the farmer next year. Jesus was really talking about us - and about God's message for us. God asks us to do good things - he expects it of us. When we don't do good things there is disappointment - but like our parents, when we get things all wrong, He is willing to give us another chance, just like the farmer who said to give the fig tree a good prune and another year to bear fruit.



In your garden, be it home, school, work, social set, or this church, we can believe in God's message to us. This message is like the sun to us. Our practice of good things like the water we need, and our understanding of his message, is like the fertilizer and bug spray we need to stay healthy. Quite occasionally, God gives us the chances we need to get things right - the opportunity to clean out the rubbish in our garden, rejuvenate and have another go!

Closing Prayer

Bless us, O God, for the opportunity to serve and be productive in your work.

You seek forgiveness and patience when we give back little for the opportunities and gifts you have laid before us. Help us to produce the fruit that you expect to receive and to offer it to you as you have commanded.

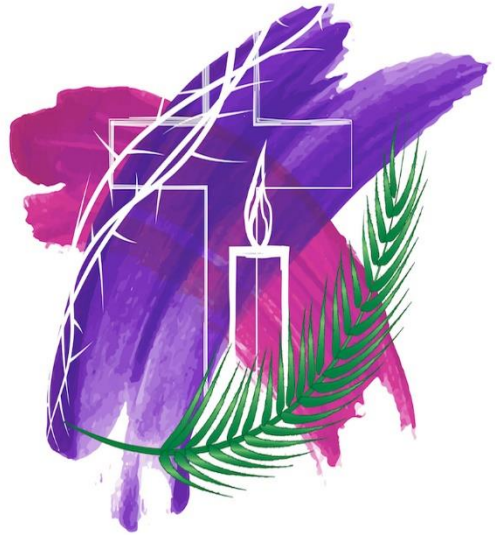
Bless the fruit of our daily endeavours to grow in spirit and awareness of service in your name.

Bless too, every thought, word, and action that we have, that they may be the fruit of true

repentance, and of strong faith and a caring love. We ask in Jesus' name.

Amen

*Thanks to Dan Eaton
for preparing today's reflection
and prayers.*



Sunday 27 March

Gathering

As we, the gathered but physically separated people, come together, let us find a candle and light it as a reminder that our darkened world is lit by the love and the light of Christ.

As we gather, let us remember and acknowledge that wherever we are we worship on the lands of the Aboriginal people of Australia, and we honour them and their elders, past, present, and emerging.



Preparation

Back in my time at the Holtermann Methodist Church, I listened each year for seven years as the Rev Roger Bush preached on the story of the Prodigal Son and never repeated himself.

So can I find something new to say about this story of a young man who lost himself to profligacy and debauchery but found love and

acceptance when he returned, down and out, to his father's house.

Readings

Psalm 43

Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.



Reflection

Knowing the God of the



It's one of those days. I'm in a rush, late for an appointment, about to leave – but where are my house keys? Not of course where they should be. Frantic search, where are they? And the huge relief when found.

In three parables, Luke reveals how the lost can be found. In the first story, he speaks of the shepherd who, having lost one sheep, searches for it until he finds it. In the second, he talks about the housewife who loses and searches to find that one coin. In both cases the shepherd and the woman actively search and when successful call in their neighbours and friends to rejoice with them.

But in the third great story, there is a difference. It is the lost son who is both loser and finder. He comes home, dirty, unkempt, starving, tail between his legs, only seeking the lowest place in his father's household. If the father had tried to find him the story does not say the

son expects rejection, and why not? He had broken all the rules, he doesn't deserve anything. But by taking the risk and coming home he finds that his father responds by running to welcome him. He embraces him, takes him home, cleans him up, reclothes him and lays on a great feast to celebrate the homecoming.

The younger son acknowledges he has sinned against both his heavenly and earthly fathers. He does not expect or ask for forgiveness or restoration to his former place in the family - just a servant's place, a servant's food. But in his father's love, his father's grace, he finds his sins forgiven.

So, what does this story of lost and found, of acceptance, not rejection, of forgiveness not condemnation say to us of God's response to our sinfulness?

Is there, for instance, such a thing as an unforgivable sin?

Remember where this story started. The scribes and the pharisees cannot accept that Jesus eats with sinners – people whose sins are so great they cannot be forgiven. Jesus told a story to illustrate that that's not the way God the Father works.

But is there a sin so great that it cannot be forgiven? A few Sundays ago we reflected on Jesus' commanding us to love everybody, friend and enemy alike, to forgive anybody who has harmed us.

First, there is no such thing as a sin that God will not forgive. At least, not according to Jesus or the Apostles. Jesus forgives everyone, all the time. It's just what he does. "Your sins are forgiven" are often the first words out of the mouth of Jesus upon meeting a stranger – without anyone ever begging for forgiveness or confessing any of their sins first. Just automatic, instantaneous forgiveness.

So, what are we saying if we continue to insist there is sin so evil that God himself cannot forgive it? Are we saying that the grace of God has limits? Jesus offered forgiveness to EVERYONE. All the time. This means no one is outside of God's reach and no one could ever do anything to disqualify themselves from the boundless mercy of God.

The lost son who had transgressed so greatly against all the rules of his day turned back. He found the way home and found the abounding grace of his father. So can we. So can anyone. And it's up to us to help people find that way back to grace.



A song to sing or read

Amazing Grace

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart
to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace
appear
The hour I first believed

Through many dangers toils and
snares
I have already come
'Tis grace has brought me safe
thus far
And grace will lead me home

When we've been there ten
thousand years
Bright shining as the sun
We've no less days to sing God's
praise
Than when we've first begun

Words and Music in the Public Domain

[Here is a link](#) to
sing along with
Amazing
Grace.



Closing Prayer

Loving, caring, welcoming God, I
need to trust that you are my God,
and no matter what I'm feeling on
the inside, no matter what's
happening around me, no matter
how hopeless or lost I feel, you're
here with me. And you're not
going anywhere.

So please calm my heart. Give me
deep breaths and clear thoughts.
When I start to worry, remind me
of your word. When I start to
question, show me answers and
the will to keep moving, even if I
feel at a standstill.

Bring me light when I'm in
darkness and a path to follow
when I feel like I'm wandering in
circles. When doors close in front
of me, give me new ones to open.
When people walk away, give me
courage to seek out relationships
that both build me, and honour
you.

Amen

*Thanks to Shirley Colless
for preparing today's reflection
and prayers.*

A Church in the Country

Outside the church, farmers strut
among wives and children,
bartering news of the wheatcrop. Six months ago,
all prayer was for rain.
Now, every hole in the cloud
brings hope for a dry harvest.

From the arched brick darkness, an organ simmers.
We go in, sit among pews
polished with shadow.
The children have gone to Sunday School. Wives and husbands
are alone here,
as they were at their weddings.

The minister mounts the altar
as a rodeo rider would steel himself for the wildest steer –
he waits for the old women
in web-thin floral dresses, and the old men
who cling to the pews
as if they were days.

And the last to come:
a woman in a wheelchair, her legs
like roots pulled carelessly from the ground,
her head dug from her shoulders
like a withered bulb;
a boy in callipers, stumbling through each moment of his being
crippled, the thud of his huge stone shoes
in the thin stream of carpet
down the aisle.

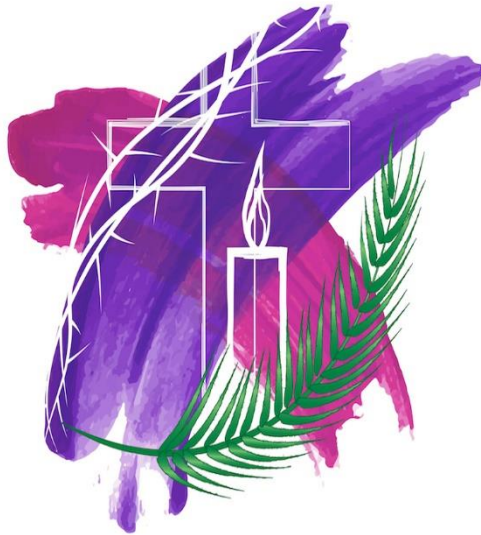
The organ comes to the boil. We stand for the first hymn.
Outside there is the sound of a car
skimming on the road.
There are seeds of rain on the shingles.

John Foulcher

Words of Mission

The cross is the way of the lost
the cross is the staff of the lame
the cross is the guide of the blind
the cross is the strength of the weak
the cross is the hope of the hopeless
the cross is the freedom of the slaves
the cross is the water of the seeds
the cross is the consolation of the bonded labourers
the cross is the source of those who seek water
the cross is the cloth of the naked.

From a 10th century African hymn





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