

Ash Wednesday

40 Days in the wilderness.

Whenever I think of that story I think of us living in our own wilderness - our own lives – just out there not knowing which way to turn. Different events tempting us to do different things. For many it would be easy to be tempted to do the things we shouldn't be doing. I couldn't imagine going 4 days without eating, let alone 40. Eat some rocks, okay – after 40 days they would look good enough to eat.

For many of us it can be easy to turn our backs on God and give in to the worldly temptations.

To reflect on the fact that we do turn our backs from God -- and to remember that we need Christ in our lives -- we take time out of our year to prepare ourselves for the celebration of Christ's defeat over sin and his triumph over death.

This season, which we call Lent, is 40 days long in remembrance of the 40 days in the wilderness when Christ was tempted – and where he overcame those temptations.

But we aren't like Christ. We succumb to temptation. We do sin. And since we do sin, we need to remember that we should continually try to improve ourselves and turn back towards God.

In the Old and New Testaments there are many references to people who were repenting of their sins. They would put on something called sackcloth, which would be similar to a burlap bag, and then they put ashes on their head.

They would do this as penitence because sackcloth was itchy and uncomfortable. And they would put ashes on their head because they were reminded of the part in the Book of Genesis where God had said when he created man, "From ashes (or dust) you have been created and to ashes you shall return." And it was because of sin that Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden and separated from God.

So today is Ash Wednesday. Luckily we don't ask anyone to put on sackcloth, but we do put ashes on our heads. But we don't do it quite like they did in the old days. We don't cover our hair with ashes from the fireplace – actually we use ashes from palm leaves from last year's Palm Sunday – which reminds us that there is still hope in our world. That yes, we are sinners, yes we need to repent, but there is still hope for all of our lives.

And the ashes are placed on our foreheads because throughout the Bible a mark on the forehead symbolizes ownership. In this case it shows that we belong to Jesus Christ.

So today, Ash Wednesday, is a day that we show an outward sign of an inward repentance.

Today we all should reflect not only how we might have sinned, but also on ways that we turned our back on God.

Maybe we didn't respond to Him the way we should, maybe we didn't do something for our church or our community that we have felt in our hearts that He was asking us to do. Or maybe we have not taken Him seriously enough in our lives.

Today is a day to put that behind us. Today is a day to turn back towards God.

I invite you, therefore, to observe a holy Lent: by self-examination, repentance, prayer, and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word.

For us to make a right beginning of repentance -- and as a sign of our mortal nature, let us now bow our heads before our creator and Redeemer, and have a moment of silent prayer and let's ask for forgiveness.

Pastor: Mark Maddox
520- 207-6453
pastor@umcSanctuary.org
www.umcSanctuary.org