



**Christ  
Lutheran**  
CHURCH

2610 Campbell Street  
Valparaiso, Indiana 46385  
(219) 462-6660 • [clcvalpo.org](http://clcvalpo.org)



*Ash Wednesday*  
February 18, 2026

## **We Welcome You to Christ Lutheran Church! We are a community of people sharing God's love through Christ and growing together in faith.**

We celebrate all the ways we are made in the image of God, seeking to see God in everyone. We honor and respect each person's age, ethnicity, family composition, gender identity, gender expression, life history, mental well-being, physical ability, relationship status, sexual orientation, skin color, and socioeconomic standing. Together, we strive to love and serve our neighbor and all creation, including working toward racial and social justice. We would love to walk with you on this creative adventure\* of faith, grace, and love.

*\* The first sermon ever preached at Christ Lutheran was titled "A Call to Creative Adventure."*

### **ABOUT WORSHIP**

We gather to worship weekly to hear and remember our shared hope: the life, death, and resurrection of Christ makes all things new, even us.

You will find everything that happens in worship printed in this bulletin, with hymns found in the red hymnals ("ELW") in the seats in front of you.

If you have a prayer request, note it on a yellow card from the seatback holder and pass it to an usher; the other side is for any information you would like about Christ Lutheran. Please feel welcome to remain seated as necessary during the service.

### **CHILDREN ARE ALWAYS WELCOME IN CHURCH!**

God's people come in all shapes and sizes – it is a gift to the whole community when the smallest of us are present! Sitting with parents and learning to treasure times of worship is the foundation for helping build a growing faith in a child's life. There's some noise and movement that we expect from little ones - feel free to make use of the **activity bags, doodle pads, bookshelf in the overflow area and quiet room at the back of the sanctuary** as needed. Whatever sacrifice of energy and effort you make to include your children in worship is multiplied as the good news of God's love takes root in their lives!

### **RESTROOMS**

Men's and women's restrooms off the Gathering Area and Church Hall have changing tables, as does the all-gender restroom near the nursery. A second all-gender restroom is through the Vestry off the East hallway, past the Welcome Center.

### **HOLY COMMUNION**

**Holy Communion** is the family meal of God's people, to which we come at Jesus' invitation. The body and blood of Christ, in the bread and wine, are his real presence with us and offer the gift of forgiveness because of his death and resurrection. Drawn together and strengthened by this meal, we are given a taste of the fullness of God's coming kingdom, and are equipped to be the hands and feet of God's love in the world. All baptized Christians are always welcome at the Lord's table.

Our services are on video, and occasional photographs are taken for our website and e-mail news. If you have concerns, please speak to a church staff member.

*Hearing assistance devices are available to those who need help with listening to the service and are located at the entrance to the sanctuary, or please see an Usher for assistance.*

**A Reminder: Please turn off all cell phones during worship services.**

*On Ash Wednesday we begin our forty-day journey toward Easter with a day of fasting and repentance. Marking our foreheads with dust, we acknowledge that we die and return to the earth. At the same time, the dust traces the life-giving cross indelibly marked on our foreheads at baptism. While we journey through Lent to return to God, we have already been reconciled to God through Christ. We humbly pray for God to make our hearts clean while we rejoice that “now is the day of salvation.” Returning to our baptismal call, we more intentionally bear the fruits of mercy and justice in the world.*

## **GATHERING**

*The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God*

### **PRELUDE**

*I Call to Thee, Lord Jesus Christ*

J.S. Bach

*A moment of silence.*

### **KYRIE**

*The assembly stands with the Presiding Minister & responds with “Lord, have mercy.”*



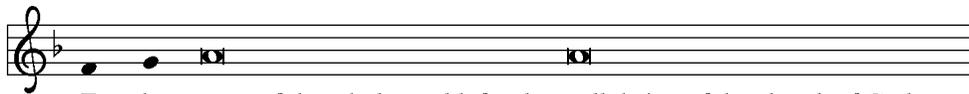
In peace, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mer-cy.**



For the peace from above, and for our sal - va - tion, let us



pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mer - cy.**



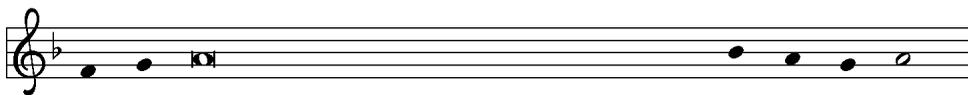
For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God,



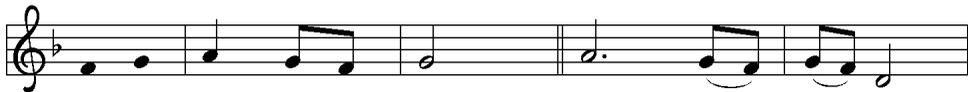
and for the u - ni - ty of all, let us pray to the Lord.



**Lord, have mer - cy.**



For this holy house, and for all who offer here their wor-ship and praise,



let us pray to the Lord. Lord, have mer - cy.



Help, save, comfort, and de - fend us, gra - cious Lord.



A - men.

## 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.**

*Children: This is the day that the Lord has made.*

**Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

*A brief silence is kept before the prayer.*

Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and our neighbors. Call forth our prayers and acts of kindness, and strengthen us to face our mortality with confidence in the mercy of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

## WORD

*God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching and song*

### **CHILDREN'S TIME**

*The assembly is seated as children are invited for a time together.*

### **READING: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17**

*Because of the coming Day of the LORD, the prophet Joel calls the people to a community lament. The repentant community reminds God of his gracious character and asks God to spare the people, lest the nations doubt God's power to save.*

<sup>1</sup> Blow 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—  
<sup>2</sup> a 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.

<sup>12</sup> Yet even now, says the LORD,  
    return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
<sup>13</sup> rend your hearts and not your clothing.

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

<sup>14</sup> Who 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?

<sup>15</sup> Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
consecrate a fast;  
call a solemn assembly;  
<sup>16</sup> gather the people.  
Consecrate the congregation;  
assemble the aged;  
gather the children,  
even infants at the breast.  
Let the bridegroom leave his room  
and the bride her canopy.

<sup>17</sup> Between 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**

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

<sup>2</sup> **Wash me through and through<sup>1</sup> from my wickedness,  
and cleanse me<sup>1</sup> from my sin.**

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>8</sup> **Let me hear<sup>1</sup> joy and gladness;  
that the body you have broken<sup>1</sup> may rejoice. R**

<sup>9</sup> Hide your face<sup>1</sup> from my sins,  
and blot out<sup>1</sup> all my wickedness.

<sup>10</sup> **Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spir- it within me.**

<sup>11</sup> Cast me not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spir- it from me.

<sup>12</sup> **Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and sustain me with your boun- tiful Spirit. R**

<sup>13</sup> Let me teach your ways to offenders,  
and sinners shall be re- stored to you.

<sup>14</sup> **Rescue me from bloodshed, O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness.**

<sup>15</sup> O Lord, o- pen my lips,  
and my mouth shall pro- claim your praise.

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

<sup>17</sup> The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit;  
a troubled and broken heart, O God, you will not despise. **R**

### **READING: 2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10**

*The ministry of the gospel endures many challenges and hardships. Through this ministry, God's reconciling activity in the death of Christ reaches into the depths of our lives to bring us into a right relationship with God. In this way, God accepts us into the reality of divine salvation.*

<sup>20b</sup> We entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

<sup>6:1</sup> As we work together with him, we entreat you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup> For he says,

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

Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation! <sup>3</sup> We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, <sup>4</sup> but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: in great endurance, afflictions, hardships, calamities, <sup>5</sup> beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; <sup>6</sup> in purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, <sup>7</sup> truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; <sup>8</sup> in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors and yet are true, <sup>9</sup> as unknown and yet are well known, as dying and look—we are alive, as punished and yet not killed, <sup>10</sup> as 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 ACCLAMATION

*The assembly stands to welcome the Gospel.*



Let your stead - fast love come to us, O Lord.



Save us as you prom - ised; we will trust your word.



Save us as you prom - ised; we will trust your word.

## GOSPEL: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

*In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commends almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, but emphasizes that spiritual devotion must not be done for show.*

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

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

<sup>2</sup> “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.<sup>3</sup> But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,<sup>4</sup> so that your alms may be done in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>5</sup> “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.<sup>6</sup> But 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.

<sup>16</sup> “And whenever you fast, do not look somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.<sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,<sup>18</sup> so 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.

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

The gospel of the Lord.  
**Praise to you, O Christ.**

### SERMON

*The assembly is seated. Time for reflection follows the sermon.*

### HYMN OF THE DAY ELW #328 *Restore in Us, O God*

*The assembly stands to proclaim the word of God in song.*



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.

## CONFESSION OF SIN

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

*Time for reflection.*

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 own 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

*The assembly is seated. When invited by the ushers, you may come forward to receive the ashes; please come up the center aisle and return to your seats via the side aisles.*

*Ministers mark the forehead of each person with a cross of ashes, saying:*

*“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”*

*As you return to your seat, you may remain seated for reflection and prayer.*

**MUSIC ACS #918** (*Stanzas are sung by the Sanctuary Choir, the congregation sings the refrain.*)

**Refrain:**



- 1 This is the fast that God would choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to let the captives go free,  
and to break the yoke of oppression. **Refrain**
- 2 Sharing your bread with the hungry  
and welcoming homeless in,  
offering hope and offering help,  
this is what God requires. **Refrain**
- 3 Then shall your light break forth as dawn,  
and healing shall come to you quickly;  
then you shall call and God shall answer,  
God's love shall go before you. **Refrain**

*After all who desire have received ashes the assembly stands as the minister continues.*

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.**

## **PRAYERS**

Reconciled by God's mercy and sustained by God's presence, let us pray for the world and its needs.

*A brief silence.*

Guide your church, O God. Accompany all Christians in this season of repentance, and renew our faith in the riches of grace you give to us in baptism. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Heal this earth, O God. Satisfy the needs of every parched place, every diverse ecosystem, every suffering creature. Though all return to dust, grant beauty and purpose to each living thing. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Restore the nations, O God. Let your healing spring up quickly across the world. Give all in authority the will to loose the bonds of injustice and let any who are oppressed go free. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Deliver your people, O God. Comfort any whose hearts are rent by grief, uphold any who are sick, bring food to those who hunger, and give housing to all without shelter. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Bless this assembly, O God. Reconcile us to one another and to you. Strengthen our resolve to fast from evil, open our hands in sharing, and quicken our prayer. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

Hold us forever, O God. We thank you for all who now know their treasure in heaven, and for all who on earth proclaimed your abounding, steadfast love.

Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Receive our prayers, O God, through Jesus Christ, our strength and salvation.

**Amen.**

## **SHARING OF THE PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

*We invite those worshiping by livestream to share a sign of peace in the chat, and for those in person we turn to offer them our greeting of peace before sharing a sign of peace with one another: **Peace be with you!***

## MEAL

*God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ*

### OFFERING

*The assembly is seated.*

*This congregation serves our neighbors, community, and the world through the participation and support of its members and guests. Because offerings are never just about us, this month we are sharing a portion of your gifts **Hilltop House** [hilltophouse.org](http://hilltophouse.org) and **Refugee Family Support Fund**.*

*If you wish to give electronically, use the QR code, browse to our secure on-line portal at [clcvalpo.org/give](http://clcvalpo.org/give) or use our **CLC app** (download at [clcvalpo.org/app](http://clcvalpo.org/app)).*



### OFFERING ANTHEM

*To Dust*

Marrolli

*Let my crying come to dust. Let my grief be turned to ashes. Let my heart be cleansed with flame. Kyrie eleison. Let my mourning turn to song. Let my sorrow turn to sunrise. Let my broken spirit rest. Christe eleison. Let your healing waters rise. Let your deserts bloom with bounty. Let your Holy Spirit come. Kyrie eleison.*

### OFFERING PRAYER

*The assembly stands as the gifts are brought forward.*

Blessed are you,

**O God, maker of all things.**

**Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts: our selves, our time, and our possessions.**

**Use us, and what we have gathered, in feeding the world with your love, through the one who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.**

**Amen.**

### GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

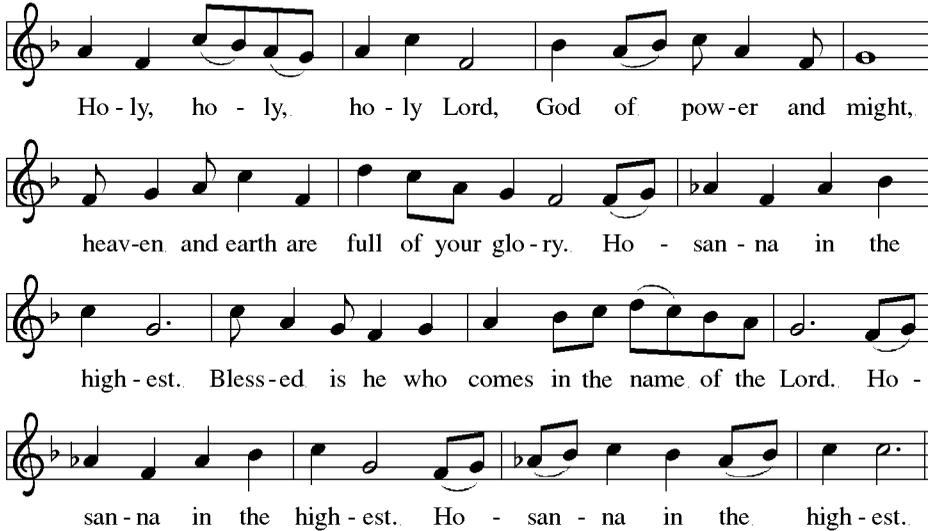
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

*The pastor begins the prayer and all join in singing:*

## SANCTUS

*(An ancient practice invites us to make the sign of the cross in honor of Jesus at the words "Blessed is he.")*



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. 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.

## TABLE PRAYER

### LORD'S PRAYER

*Children: The Spirit makes us one. We pray as Jesus taught us:*

**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

Taste and see  
that the Lord is good.  
**Thanks be to God!**

*The assembly is seated.*

## DISTRIBUTION

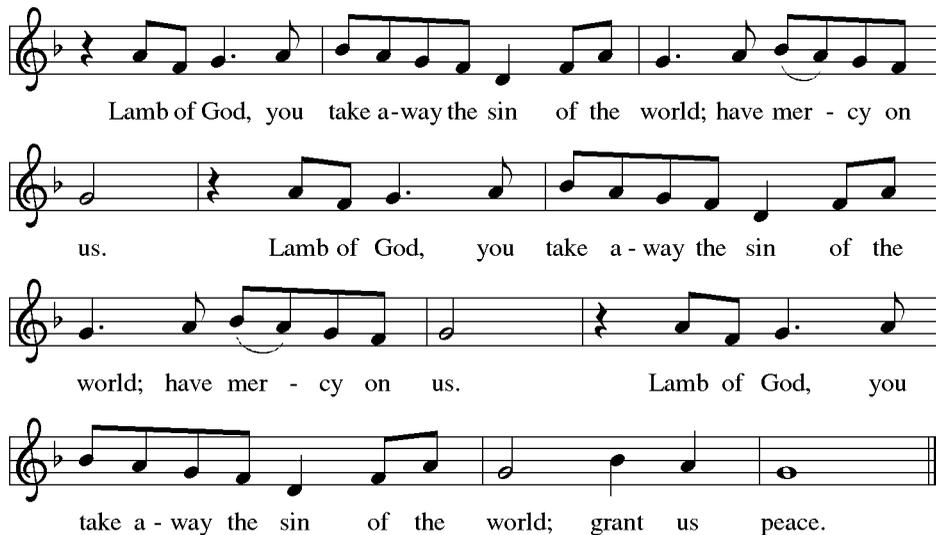
*The pastor invites those worshipping via **livestream** to commune:*

The body of Christ, given for you.  
**Amen (receive the bread)**

The blood of Christ, shed for you.  
**Amen (receive the cup)**

**In-person distribution:** When indicated by the ushers, come up the right-hand ramp to approach the altar rail. When finished you may leave individually without being dismissed. WINE is lighter-colored and GRAPE JUICE is dark; they are received via individual cups in the trays. USED GLASSES are placed in the basket located near the ramp. GLUTEN-FREE BREAD IS AVAILABLE, please indicate to the server that you require this.

## 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.

**COMMUNION ANTHEM***Dust, Remember You are Splendor*

Organ

*Dust, remember you are splendor: in God's image you were made; God's own breath breathes in your breathing; God's own hands shaped you of clay: noble, precious, and beloved, godliness in dust arrayed. Dust, remember you are splendor, set aside the works of night; put away the deeds of darkness; set your face toward God's own light, nevermore to yoke and trample, nevermore to press and slight. Dust, remember you are splendor: strive to walk the narrow way; follow Christ into the desert; there the Spirit's call to obey. Now, the time of your returning; now your resurrection day. Dust, remember you are splendor: like a watered garden grow; light warm you like the dawning; rivers through your glades shall flow; fruitful, precious, and beloved, you shall God's own splendor show.*



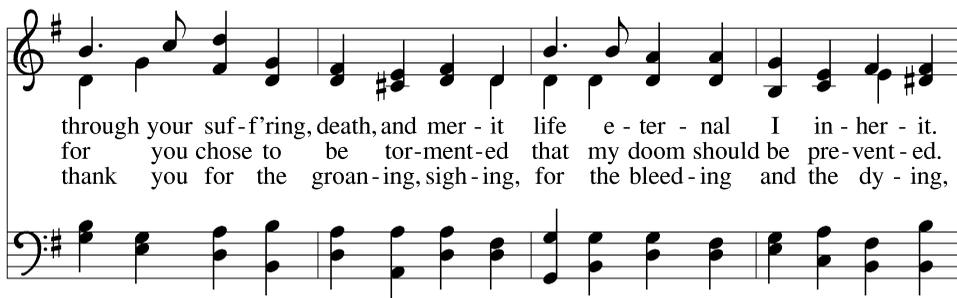
# COMMUNION HYMN ELW #339 *Christ, the Life of All the Living*



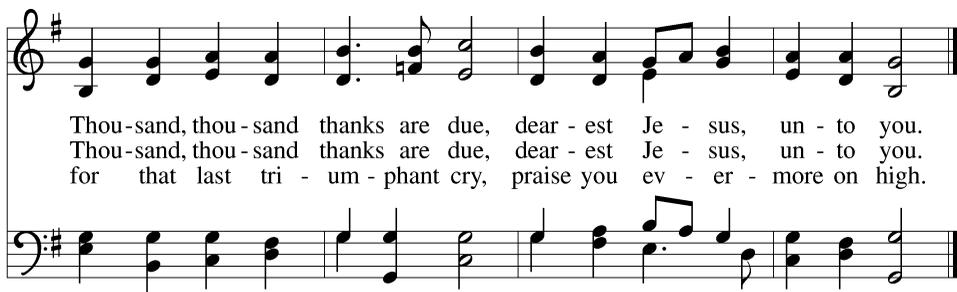
1 Christ, the life of all the liv - ing, Christ, the death of death, our foe,  
2 You have suf - fered great af - flic - tion and have borne it pa - tient - ly,  
3 Then, for all that bought my par - don, for the sor - rows deep and sore,



Christ, your - self for me once giv - ing to the dark - est depths of woe:  
e - ven death by cru - ci - fix - ion, ful - ly to a - tone for me;  
for the an - guish in the gar - den, I will thank you ev - er - more;



through your suf - f'ring, death, and mer - it life e - ter - nal I in - her - it.  
for you chose to be tor - ment - ed that my doom should be pre - vent - ed.  
thank you for the groan - ing, sigh - ing, for the bleed - ing and the dy - ing,



Thou - sand, thou - sand thanks are due, dear - est Je - sus, un - to you.  
Thou - sand, thou - sand thanks are due, dear - est Je - sus, un - to you.  
for that last tri - um - phant cry, praise you ev - er - more on high.

*After all have returned to their places, the assembly stands as the minister continues.*  
The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.  
**Amen.**

### **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

We give you thanks, almighty God,  
that you have refreshed us through the  
healing power of this gift of life.  
In your mercy, strengthen us through this gift,  
in faith toward you  
and in fervent love toward one another;  
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

### **SENDING**

*God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world*

### **BLESSING**

Almighty God,  
Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit,  
bless you now and forever.  
**Amen.**

### **Worship Participants**

Lector/Prayers: Angela Wehner

Communion Assistants: Sara Long and Holly Knauff

Ushers: Tim Sutherland

Video/Livestream:

Light/Sound: Tony Reinold

Pastors: Timothy Knauff, Jr. & Erica Gibson-Even

Director of Music Ministries: Brian Bartusch

Worship Participants: Sanctuary Choir

On my heart im - print your im - age, bless - ed Je - sus, king of grace,

that life's trou - bles nor its plea - sures ev - er may your work e - rase.

Let the clear in - scrip - tion be: Je - sus, cru - ci - fied for me,

is my life, my hope's foun - da - tion, all my glo - ry and sal - va - tion!

**DISMISSAL**

Children: Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

**Thanks be to God!**

## **A Celebration of Mortality**

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” These words will be spoken in congregations and communities around the world today as Christians gather to remember our collective mortality with a smudge of ashes on our foreheads. Facing the reality of death can feel grim, and to go as far as to celebrate our mortality can feel countercultural in every way. Yet, perhaps it is in remembering our mortality, our frailty, and our limits that we find true freedom.

On Ash Wednesday, we are set free from our striving to be God. We are set free from the expectation that we are somehow superhuman. We can lay down the false hope that achievement, fame, wealth, popularity, or being “good enough” can save us from our inevitable end. We are freed from our endless attempts to convince ourselves or others that we are right or perfect or holy or that we have it all together. Instead, we get to exhale as we remember that we are nothing but human. We are creatures of the dust, and despite our striving, our convincing, our appearance-making, despite every attempt at maximizing our time or our money or climbing whatever ladder we are trying to climb . . . we are dust, and to dust we shall return.

Ash Wednesday invites us to take our rightful place with the rest of creation. After all, God is God, and we are not. And yet, God sees our dusty human selves and calls us “good” (Genesis 1:27, 31). Christ enters into our very human, very mortal lives and makes us holy, giving us the gift of abundant and eternal life. We have already been made new. We have already been declared good. We have all we need, and now we are freed to simply live.

But first, we remember the dust. And we remember the One who formed us from the dust and who will meet us when we return to dust at the end.

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