



**First Congregational Church
Our Church in Worship**

March 5, 2025 9:00 AM
Ash Wednesday

PRELUDE *Wondrous Grace* – arr. Mary Ann Fritz Adam Peithmann

*CALL TO WORSHIP (Responsive) Rev. Barbara Papagian

Leader: Holy One, open our hearts, lips, minds, and spirits, and we will declare your praise.

People: We gather in your name and in your presence to worship you,

Leader: To reorient our lives in your kingdom, and to direct our attention toward you.

People: May your power flow through us as spirit meets spirit.

Leader: As we reflect upon your goodness and the needs of the world, stir our hearts toward compassion,

All: And our lives toward active participation in your realm. May it be so. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER (Responsive) Jennifer Plourde

Leader: Holy God, we need your grace towards us and for us to extend to ourselves and others. Help us be agents of your kingdom and citizens of your realm. May our love and compassion have no borders or bounds.

All: Release us from unforgiveness and condemnation in favor of restoration and redemption. Let your way direct, transform, and compel us as your witnesses in the world. Let our feast or fasting not be in vain but a testament to your presence among us and within us. In the name of the Author or Redemptive Love, we pray. Amen.

OPENING HYMN NO. 180 *Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days*

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD’S PRAYER Rev. Barbara Papagian

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 debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Luke 9:28-35

MEDITATION

“God, Help Us to Listen to Jesus”

SERVICE OF ASHES

PRAYER OVER THE ASHES (Unison)

Rev. Barbara Papagian

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 everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

Rev. Christopher Stevens

Those who wish to may come forward to receive the ashes. Please indicate whether you wish the ashes to be put on the back of the hand or the forehead.

ASH WEDNESDAY PRAYER (Responsive)

Rev. Barbara Papagian

Leader: Merciful God, this day we bow our heads before you, our brows marked with the ashes that betray our origins as creatures of dust. We were destined by nature to return to dust, but now you have intervened on our behalf.

All: There are no words to thank you for such favor or even to describe the force of love by which you call us from death to life at your side. Grant us the strength to live lives worthy of that calling. With the mark of the cross upon us, help us forgive others as you have forgiven us. Help us strive for the protection and redemption of all people even as you have protected and redeemed us. Help us love one another as you have loved us. In the name of Christ. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN NO. 587

Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross

BENEDICTION

Rev. Christopher Stevens

POSTLUDE

My Shepherd Will Supply My Need – arr. Franklin Ritter

*You are invited to stand if you wish.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Luke 9:28-35 ²⁸ About eight days later Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus. ³¹ They were glorious to see. And they were speaking about his exodus from this world, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.

³² Peter and the others had fallen asleep. When they woke up, they saw Jesus' glory and the two men standing with him. ³³ As Moses and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, not even knowing what he was saying, blurted out, "Master, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ³⁴ But even as he was saying this, a cloud overshadowed them, and terror gripped them as the cloud covered them. ³⁵ Then a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him."

John 15:9, 11-12 ⁹ "I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love... ¹¹ I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! ¹² This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.

WHY DO WE GATHER

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent with a moving and ancient ceremony that originated in Gaul in the sixth century. Our Ash Wednesday worship service is penitential in nature. It calls upon us to humbly face in ourselves those ways in which we fall short of God's will for our lives. In this way, we open ourselves to the possibility of God's healing grace and forgiveness.

The ashes are traditionally produced by burning the dried palms left over from the previous year's Palm Sunday service. In the burning of the palms, we recognize that those who cheered Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday were some of the same people who called for his crucifixion the following Friday. Ash Wednesday invites us to recognize that, in much the same way, by our own failures of love and faith, we too participate in the crucifixion of Christ. Yet, as our faith in Christ affirms, all those who come before God seeking forgiveness will be joyfully received.

The service of ashes is one of confession and healing, as well as a rededication to the ministry of Christ. The ashes are placed on the forehead in the sign of the cross as a reminder of Paul's words, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

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**Manchester, New Hampshire
United Church of Christ**

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You are welcome here! An Open & Affirming Congregation