

Welcome to
St. Luke Union Church

Presbyterian Church (USA) • United Church of Christ
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Ash Wednesday Worship Service

February 18, 2026 6:00pm

WELCOME

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

Where are you, people of God? Are your hearts near to the One who created you?

We come searching for You, O Lord, longing to draw closer to Your presence.

Where are your treasures? Are they in the things of this world or the treasurers of heaven?

We seek to store our treasurers in You, where they will endure forever.

Where are you in this journey of faith? Are you ready to return to God with all your heart?

With humble hearts and contrite spirits, we come to worship, to repent, and to be renewed.

Lord, here we are. Meet us in this sacred time and draw us into Your steadfast love.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Merciful and loving God, As we gather on this sacred night, you ask us, "Where are you?" You call us to examine our hearts, our priorities, and our lives. Are we near to you, or have we wandered afar? Today, we confess that we have often strayed, storing up treasures that fade and seeking approval from the world instead of you. Yet, over and over, you invite us back, not with condemnation, but with grace and love.

Help us to return to you with all our hearts, to worship not with empty rituals but with sincerity and truth. Teach us to give, to pray, and to fast in ways that reflect your light in the world.

Mark us this day with the ashes of repentance and the hope of renewal. Guide us through this season of Lent to rediscover where we are in Your love, in Your grace, and in the eternal life You offer through Jesus Christ. In Jesus's name we pray, Amen.

***HYMN #376**

"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"

CALL TO CONFESSION

In quiet trust, in simple words, we enter a space for prayer. As we confess our sins, both secret and public, the door to God's heart is open, and we enter into grace and mercy.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God, we come to you humbly and ask your forgiveness. We have made choices that offer a poor witness to your Name. Because of our sinful action or inaction, people have likely looked upon us and asked, "Where is their God?" We repent of the sin we have knowingly chosen, and we repent of the sin that we have inadvertently committed. We are tired of wandering, and we desire to return to you. Receive us, O God, and set us free to lovingly serve you in ways that bring honor to you and our neighbors. We pray this in Jesus's most holy name. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

According to God's steadfast love, according to God's abundant mercy, God does not pass judgment on us the judgment we deserve.

God creates in us clean hearts and gives a new and right spirit. In the grace of Jesus Christ, we return to God forgiven. Praise God for our salvation!

***HYMN OF RESPONSE #280 (Verse 1)**

"Amazing Grace"

ANTHEM

"There's a Wideness in God's Mercy" SLUC Choir

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

In this purple-hued season, God of mercy, we need the light of your Word to break forth like the dawn. If you will guide us continually, then even the parched places in us will be like a watered garden. If words of blame are replaced with your Word of grace and truth, then our crumbling foundations can be rebuilt for generations. By the power of your Holy Spirit, speak to us and do not hold back. In Christ's name we ask it. **Amen.**

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

Isaiah 58:1-12

GOSPEL LESSON

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

SERMON

“Return to the Lord”
Rev. Dr. Andrew J. Gifford

*HYMN #399

“We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight”

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Leader: Return to the Lord your God, for God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning, let us come before God in prayer.

People: We return to you, O Lord. Have mercy on us.

Leader: God of the day of the Lord—a day of darkness and thick clouds—you know the shadows we carry, the fears we hide, and the ways we have wandered.

People: Search our hearts, O God, and lead us in your truth.

Leader: You call us to rend our hearts and not our clothing, to turn inward where only you can see, and to trust your mercy more than our defenses.

People: Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew us.

Leader: For the times we have practiced our faith to be noticed, for generosity that sought praise, for prayers spoken loudly but lived shallowly—

People: Forgive us, Lord, and teach us to seek you in secret.

Leader: For the ways we have fasted without humility, denied ourselves without love, or stored up treasures that do not last—

People: Turn our hearts toward heaven, where true life is found.

Leader: We pray for your church, called to be a humble witness: that we may lead not with noise but with compassion, not with pride but with quiet faithfulness.

People: Restore your people, O God, and make us a blessing.

Leader: We pray for the nations, for those living in fear and upheaval, for all who face loss, hunger, war, or uncertainty.

People: Spare your people, O Lord, and let your mercy be known.

Leader: We lift before you those who are sick, grieving, weary, or alone. Hear the prayers we speak aloud and those we hold in silence.

People: Draw near, O God, and sustain all who call upon you.

Leader: As we receive the mark of ashes, remind us of who we are: dust held in mercy, fragile lives claimed by love, people of repentance and hope.

People: We belong to you, O Lord, now and always. Amen.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

*HYMN #81

“Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days”

*CHARGE & BENEDICTION

*POSTLUDE