



Rockville United Church
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)/United Church of Christ
Ash Wednesday ~ February 18, 2026
Hybrid Worship ~ 7:00 p.m.

Cover image by Annika Gordon on unsplash.com

Gather in Silence

***CALL TO WORSHIP**

Blessing The Dust

Jan Richardson

All those days you felt like dust, like dirt, as if all you had to do was turn your face toward the wind and be scattered to the four corners or swept away by the smallest breath as insubstantial—

Did you not know what the Holy One can do with dust?

This is the day we freely say we are scorched. This is the hour we are marked by what has made it through the burning. This is the moment we ask for the blessing that lives within the ancient ashes, that makes its home inside the soil of this sacred earth.

So let us be marked not for sorrow. And let us be marked not for shame. Let us be marked not for false humility or for thinking we are less than we are, but for claiming what God can do within the dust, within the dirt, within the stuff of which the world is made, and the stars that blaze in our bones, and the galaxies that spiral inside the smudge we bear.

PRAYER (unison)

Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and neighbors. Call forth our prayers and strengthen us to face our mortality, that we may reach with confidence for your mercy; in Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

***HYMN**

Lord Jesus, Who Throughout these Forty Days

Chancel Hymnal, No. 180

Lord, who throughout these forty days, for us did fast and pray,
teach us with you to mourn our sins and close by you to stay.

As you with Satan did contend, and did the victory win,
O give us strength in you to fight, in you to conquer sin.

And thro' these days of penitence, and thro' your passion-tide,
forevermore, in life and death, O Christ with us abide.

Abide with us, that through of doubts and hope and pain,
an Easter of unending joy we may at last attain!

SCRIPTURE**Joel 2:1-2, 12-13**

NRSV

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—
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.

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
 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.

One: Listen to what the Spirit is teaching.
All: **Thanks be to God.**

INVITATION TO LENTEN DISCIPLINE

Friends in Christ, every year at this time, we celebrate our redemption through the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ. Lent is a time to prepare for this celebration and to renew our life in the paschal mystery. We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance, and for the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the Gospel of Jesus.

We begin our journey to Easter with the sign of ashes. This ancient sign speaks of the frailty and uncertainty of human life, and marks publicly our sincere desire for penitence. We invite you then, in the name of Christ, to observe a holy Lent, by self-examination, and penitence, by prayer and fasting, by works of love, and by reading and meditating on the Word of God. Let us bow before God, our Creator and Redeemer, and confess our sin.

PSALM 51:1-17 (responsively)

Have mercy on me, O God,
 according to your steadfast love;
 according to your abundant mercy
 blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
 and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.

Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased.

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

One: Listen to what the Spirit is teaching.

All: ***Thanks be to God.***

*HYMN

Forty Days and Forty Nights

Chancel Hymnal, No. 179

Forty days and forty nights you were fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights tempted, and yet undefiled.

Shall not we your sorrow share, and from worldly joys abstain,
fasting with unceasing prayer, strong with you to suffer pain?

Then if Satan on us press, flesh or spirit to assail,
victor in the wilderness, grant that we not faint nor fail!

So shall we have peace divine: holier gladness ours shall be;
round us, too, shall angels shine, such as served you faithfully.

Keep, O keep us, Savior dear, ever constant by your side;
that with you we may appear at the eternal Eastertide.

CONFSSION

I confess to God Almighty, before the whole company of heaven, and to you, siblings, that I have sinned in thought, word and deed, therefore I pray God Almighty to have mercy on me, forgive me all my sins, and bring me to everlasting life, Amen.

The almighty and merciful God grant you pardon, forgiveness and remission of all your sins.
Amen.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

Receiving ashes is optional. You may receive them on your forehead, or on the back of your hand. You may also come forward for a blessing, without receiving the ashes if you wish. There is no requirement for how long you must keep the ashes on.

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth, the stardust of the universe. May these ashes be for us a reminder of our need for forgiveness when we turn away, and our eternal connection with you and all creation, through your gracious gift of love in Jesus Christ. Amen.

and as the ashes are imposed on each person...

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

CLOSING PRAYER (unison)

*Eternal God, creator of heaven and earth.
You brought all things into being and called them good.
Your love fills and forms the world
taking shape in the infinite expressions of your creativity.
From the dust of the earth you formed us into your image
and breathed into us the breath of life.
Through your great love, you draw near to us.
Even when we turn away, your love remains steadfast.
Prepare now our hearts and lead us during these forty days of Lent,
to commit ourselves to serve you, to work for justice, and to live in peace,
through the power of the Christ in our midst. Amen.*

CHORAL RESPONSE

Nothing Can Trouble

Taize

*Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.
Those who seek God shall never go wanting.
Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.
God alone fills us.*

BENEDICTION

(Forehead) May the knowledge that you are part of an infinite connection with God and all life dwell in your thoughts.

(Ears) May you listen closely to how God invites you to grow spiritually during this Lenten season.

(Eyes) May you slow down and look more intently in order to find God's movement in your life.

(Shoulders) May you carry your cross of difficulties with courage, trusting God's strength to uphold you.

(Hands) May your service be so intertwined with God that this love overflows from your heart.

(Heart) May you keep turning your heart toward God and allow this love to permeate the way you live your life.

(Feet) May you welcome God's companionship and guidance as you travel the path of life.

(Hug) May you return to embrace your connection with the Source of Life. May you participate in the mystery of God-with-us.

May you welcome the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. Go in Peace.

(Body Blessing for Lent, Joyce Rupp)

Depart in silence. You may remain for private prayer.

Welcome to Rockville United Church!

We are glad you have joined us for worship this evening. We trust that you will find RUC to be a welcoming and engaging place to explore the life of faith within a community that honors each person's spiritual journey. We encourage you to ask questions, visit our website, and share your contact information at the welcome table near the front doors.

I hope to greet you personally following worship, and invite you to contact me.

Blessings,
Rev. Jennifer Knutsen
jennifer@rockvilleunitedchurch.org

Our complimentary Wi-Fi network is **RUC Mesh**. The password is **heavenly**.



Please Scan Me To Give To RUC.



Rockville United Church

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)/United Church of Christ

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(Office Hours: Wed, Fri—10am to 3pm or by appointment)

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