

“Blessing the Dust” by 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.



“Worship God, Love One Another, Serve the World”



Ash Wednesday

7:00 pm February 18, 2026

665 W Corbett Avenue
Swansboro, North Carolina 28584
910 326-4822
www.SwansboroUMC.org

Pastor Laura Thompson: PastorLaura@swansboroumc.org
Pastor Elias Ballew: PastorElias@swansboroumc.org
Worship Leader: Lindsay Williams: Music@swansboroumc.org
Piano & Organ: Terri Boykin

Ash Wednesday Service

Prelude "God So Loved the World" Terri Boykin

Gathering Words

*Call to Worship

We are formed of the dust.

To dust we shall return.

This truth is a gift.

It reminds us that we are created, not the Creator.

It invites us to trust the One who made us.

It offers us perspective and corrects our bent toward idolatry.

We are formed of the dust.

To dust we shall return.

Thanks be to God who formed us in God's image.

*Hymn "Come and Find the Quiet Center" TFWS #2128

A Reading from the Prophet Joel 2: 12-18

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray together:

God, this is a hard time. The focus of Lent is on the pain and suffering of Jesus and our own need for penitence. But we would rather skip this part and go straight to Easter. We would rather ignore the suffering—in you and in the world—and avoid the hard work of true self-examination. Forgive us for wanting this to be bright and sunny and easy when we know that Jesus did not take the easy way, but chose the brave path of the Cross. Teach us the true meaning of penitence, of turning away from self-interest, so that we use this Lenten season to humbly seek a clean heart and a renewed spirit. We pray in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen.

A Reading from the Psalmist Psalm 51 (The Msg)

Response "Create in Me a Clean Heart"

**Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a right spirit within me.**

**Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a right spirit within me.**

Cast me not away from Thy presence;

Take not Thy holy Spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation;

And renew a right spirit within me.

*Gospel Lesson Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Homily Rev. Elias Ballew

Response "Create in Me a Clean Heart" (refrain)

Prayers of Confession

O God, when we pause to look back at our lives on this Ash Wednesday, we realize that we have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. We have neglected to do good when it was in our power to do so. We, like believers of old, have pulled down Your altars and built idols crafted in our own image. We have not dealt honorably with our enemies or our friends. Forgive us, O God, for turning sackcloth and ashes into a fashion statement by pursuing form without substance. As we begin the journey of these forty days, wash us, O God, and we shall be clean. Cleanse us, O Lord, and we shall be made whole. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

The Lord our God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. God hears the earnest cries of the repentant and forgives our sins. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Special Music "Dust and Ashes" Choir

Invitation to Imposition

Thanksgiving Over Ashes

Imposition of Ashes

All are invited forward to receive the imposition of ashes and to kneel and pray for as long as the Spirit leads.

Prayer

*Hymn "Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days" UMH #269

Blessing the Dust

Postlude "In the Cross of Christ I Glory" Terri Boykin