



Ash Wednesday: Beauty

Prelude

Wondrous Grace

Gathering

with song "Purveyors of Awe"

The late modern mystic and author, John O'Donohue, said this in his book, *Beauty: The invisible Embrace*, "We live between the act of awakening and the act of surrender. Each morning we awaken to the light and the invitation to a new day in the world of time; each night we surrender to the dark to be taken to play in the world of dreams where time is no more. At birth we are awakened and emerged to become visible in the world. At death we will surrender again to the dark to become invisible. Awakening and surrender: they frame each day and each life; between them is the journey where anything can happen, the beauty and the frailty."

*Open my eyes that I may see
glimpses of truth thou hast for me.
Place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.*

*Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me,
Spirit divine!*

We begin this day on the journey of Lent. Lent is a time to pay attention. It is historically a time of heightened spiritual practices in the lives of Christians. We make more room for contemplation, more room for prayer, more room for study. This year, we will make more room for awe. We will become "purveyors of awe"—those who promote and dispense a precious good. We will discover that awe is indeed a precious good in the world, and we will seek to bring more of its elements alive in us, and in our community: Beauty, Wonder, Meaning, Curiosity, Exploration, Delight, Connection, and Self-Giving.

*Open the eyes of my heart, Lord
Open the eyes of my heart,
I want to see you
I want to see you*

*Open the eyes of my heart, Lord
Open the eyes of my heart,
I want to see you
I want to see you*

We begin in our Ash Wednesday service by remembering the beauty of life. Beauty is our theme tonight and our main theme this week. Beauty is complex. We call something "achingly beautiful" when it creates a *pathos* within us—a sense of something so precious that we want it to last forever—from the plump cheeks of a

newborn to the wrinkled face of an elder. But alas, we are all mortal and not meant to exist in this bodily form forever. We were made from dust, and to dust we shall return. We open ourselves to the awe that is the beauty of life in between the first and last breath.

*Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.*

*Open my eyes, illumine me,
Spirit divine!*

****Gathering Song**

For the Beauty of the Earth, 40

Prayer of Transformation— Awe-inspiring God, we come together this day because we need to be reminded to see through the lens of beauty. Too often, we admire a standard of beauty that leaves too much out of its definition, forgetting that life and its imperfections are inherently beautiful simply because it exists. Open us to perceive anew. Inspire us to receive our surroundings with awe. Forgive us when we move through our lives and do not notice your handiwork in all things, all people. Be with us on this journey as we seek again to marvel at your works.

The Lord's Prayer (unison)—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.

Declaration of Grace— All of the cosmos was created and called good. You are a part of this mystery of life. God forgives us. Jesus embraces us. The Spirit enlivens us. We are whole. With awe, we accept this belovedness. And all God's people say, "Amen."

Sung Prayer Response

*You are a great and awesome God,
your wonders we proclaim.
You are our Rock, our Strength, our
Shield, from age to age the same.*

*You forgive us all our sins,
you transform us with your love.
In joyful, grateful, hearts we sing
you are a great and awesome God.*

Choir

I Surrender All

Ancient Reading

Job 33:2-4 (Inclusive Bible)

Now I will open my mouth;

my tongue and lips will form words.

And those words will come from an upright heart,

*and my lips will speak about what I know to be true.
The Spirit of God is what made me;
the breath of Shaddai gives me life.*

Psalm 27:4 (Inclusive Bible)

*One thing I ask of you, YHWH,
one thing I seek:
that I may dwell in your house all the days of my life,
to gaze on your beauty
and to meditate in your Temple.*

Meditation

In Awe of the Word

We Respond to God's Word with Our Giving

Invitation—Behold the beauty of God all around us, a gift that nurtures and sustains the awe in our lives, that touches our hearts, and graces our vision. In grateful response, let us bring to God our gifts that others too might know the beauty of our great and awesome God.

March Benevolence—One Great Hour of Sharing & Our Church's Wider Mission

****Doxology**

*Praise God, Creator of us all,
Praise Christ, by whom we hear our call,
Praise Spirit, that which sets us free,
Our awe is yours, the One-in-Three.*

We Give Thanks—Generous God, thank you for the beauty we behold in the generosity brought forth this day in our offerings to you and your church. Bless these gifts that they might be awesome signs of your love in this world and we serve and enrich your beloved. Amen.

Imposition of Ashes

Hymn

Near the Cross, 479

A Prayer— Holy and Living God, we approach this moment with awe at the beauty of life. The passage of time is etched on every face. The beauty of infancy, so fresh from your creative hand, pulls at our hearts and we feel the hope of the future. The wrinkled corners of eyes that have witnessed so many years proclaim the beauty of lived experience. And all the beauty of every

age, no matter what age, makes us pause in awe of the story of being alive. Each moment is precious.

God of all life, of our ancestors and of those yet to come after us, hear our prayers this day. We come to receive the reminder upon our foreheads of the dust from which we came and the dust to which we shall return. Help us to come with humble hearts, for this is beautiful in your sight. We do not always act in ways that align with beauty. We squander opportunities to bring more beauty and awe into this world, and instead we choose fear and destruction of love. We sometimes choose complacency over action, comfort over self-giving, privilege over justice. Turn us around into the journey of discipleship in Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Ashes—You're invited to come forward now to receive ashes. If you'd rather have them on your hand than forehead, just hold your hand out to me. If you'd like to remain seated and have me come to you, just raise your hand.

As you come forward, you're also invited to pick up a gift to carry with you this season. It's a small camera charm that can serve as a reminder to you to be on the lookout for awe each week this season. You can add it to a necklace chain, tie a string around it and use it as a bookmark, or hang it from your rear view mirror. It fits with our Photography and Faith series we'll be doing as we slow down to pay attention to what God is up to around us this Lent.

Hymn

Healer of Our Every Ill, 630

Benediction—Benedictions are blessings. And blessings are all around us. So for this season, instead of bowing your head as I offer a Benediction blessing, I invite you to open your palms in a position of receiving, and hold your head high, imagining a radiant stream of light from above shining upon you and everything else around you. And until we meet again, when you need to be reminded of the beauty of this life, take this stance again. Open your palms to receive, look around to perceive, and notice one small thing that can light up your heart for a moment.

And now may you go forth remembering John O'Donohue's words:

“Awakening and surrender: they frame each day and each life; between them is the journey where anything can happen, the beauty and the frailty.” Be a “purveyor of awe,” curating a life of spiritual depth that inspires others to join you on the journey.

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May the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of Awe, the Holy One-in-Three, be with you now and throughout these days, Amen.

Postlude

The Penitent Heart

Service adapted from worshipdesignstudio.com/awe.