



# LENT

THROUGH THE LENS OF ASH WEDNESDAY

Our mortality, God's suffering, and our call to solidarity through racial justice



*Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent: a time of penitence, prayer, and fasting. Too often, we have limited this to a personal experience. This Litany calls us as Free Methodists into our corporate identity as Christ's Body. Here as a community, we repent not only individually but corporately, and not only for personal sins, but for systemic sins of racial injustice and our participation in them.*

*On Ash Wednesday we are marked with ashes in the shape of a cross, a sign of our mortality and of God's great love. The downward stroke signals the mark of death on our lives, a mark we do not bear alone because of Christ's death on the cross. The horizontal stroke signals God's great love, love that empowers us to bear the suffering of others, to acknowledge our participation in systems of injustice, and to live in solidarity with the oppressed.*

*As we observe Lent, we remember the kind of fasting God desires: to loose the chains of injustice, untie the cords of the yoke, and set the oppressed free, to share our food with the hungry and provide the poor wanderer with shelter, to clothe the naked and not turn away from our own flesh and blood (Isaiah 58:6).*

*May this litany and the accompanying reflections serve as an invitation to self-examination and repentance, to heed the voices of those who have suffered racism and injustice, and to lament with humility and true fasting. We invite you to pray this litany at Ash Wednesday, and each week in Lent as you read reflections from other Free Methodists on these themes. And in so doing, may God's Holy Spirit prepare us for the feast of Easter.*

## THE LITANY

**Leader:** We bless you almighty and gracious God, who out of love chose to become mortal, to step into suffering, death and hopelessness, and to be in solidarity with the lowly.

**People:** Your love endures forever.

**Leader:** Help us remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return. As we are marked by ashes, marked by the cross, remind us that your death forever connects you to radical martyrs, to people who speak truth to power, and to victims of fear and hate-driven violence.

**People:** Your love endures forever.

**Leader:** We acknowledge, Jesus, that your cross is not unlike the lynching tree, internment camps, the refugee settlements caused by genocides and holy wars, and the terror inflicted at the hands of White supremacy.

**People:** Your love endures forever.

**Leader:** And so, most holy and merciful Father, we confess that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart, mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. Lord have mercy:

**People:** We have sinned against you and your people.

**Leader:** As a church, we have inherited a faith that was used to justify the theft of native lands and the enslavement of Black bodies. We have dismissed the voices of Asian Americans and failed to honor our Latino sisters and brothers. Lord, have mercy:

**People:** We have sinned against you and your people.

**Leader:** Forgive us, as an American church that is still majority white in membership, leadership, and orientation, for not listening to and working alongside our sisters and brothers of color who have courageously stood in opposition to the oppressive version of Christianity propagated by whiteness and civil religion. Lord have mercy;

**People:** We have sinned against you and your people.

**Leader:** Forgive us for perpetuating a whitewashed history of our nation and our church regarding racism, for using our privilege to shield us from the truth, and for our failure to own our part in ongoing harm. Lord have mercy;

OR

**Leader:** Forgive us for failing to hear the factual, sordid history of our nation and of the church regarding racism, for using our privilege to shield us from the truth, and for our failure to own our part in ongoing harm. Lord have mercy;

**People:** We have sinned against you and your people.

**Leader:** For our unfaithfulness and disobedience; for the pride, vanity, and hypocrisy of our lives; for hearts shriveled by generations of suppressed empathy, and eyes that have lost the ability to see siblings who suffer from systemic injustice. Lord, have mercy:

**People:** We have sinned against you and your people.

**Leader:** For our exploitation of others, our false belief that we can somehow know you without being committed to justice for all, and our unwillingness to give of ourselves in love; Lord, have mercy:

**People:** We have sinned against you and your people.

**Leader:** For closing our eyes to human need and suffering, and for our indifference to racism, injustice and the resulting cruelty; Lord, have mercy:

**People:** We have sinned against you and your people.

**Leader:** For all false judgments, for prejudice and contempt of those “not like us,” and for all uncharitable thoughts, assumptions and actions toward our neighbors; Lord, have mercy:

**People:** We have sinned against you and your people.

**Leader:** As we face our mortality, our sin and our participation in systems of sin, and as we claim your never-failing love, make our love greater than our fear.

**People:** Make our love greater than our fear, greater than our willful ignorance, greater than our false judgements.

**Leader:** That we may listen well, and may enter into the pain of others in solidarity as you have done with us. That we may learn to love as we have been radically loved, though it may mean suffering. That we may be instruments of your peace.

**People:** That we may be courageous in love.

**Leader:** Because death is not the end.

**Together:** Your love endures forever.

NOTE: With gratitude, we acknowledge that portions of this litany were inspired by and borrowed from selections of *Rally: Communal Prayers for Lovers of Jesus and Justice* edited and compiled by Britney Winn Lee, Fresh Air Books, 2020. Specifically: "Gospel Reconstruction: A Lament for Slaveholder Religion and the Ongoing Racism That Infects Us" by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and "Will the Darkness Win?: A Maundy Thursday Peace and Justice Litany" by Britney Winn Lee.