

First Presbyterian Church

5401 S. Claiborne Ave
New Orleans, La. 70125

Ash Wednesday *Reading for Meditation*

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

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, and abounding in steadfast
love, and relents from punishing.
Who knows whether he will not turn and
relent, and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain-offering and a drink-offering
 for the Lord, your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sanctify a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
 gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation;
 assemble the aged;
gather the children,
 even infants at the breast.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
 and the bride her canopy.
Between the vestibule and the altar
 let the priests, the ministers of the Lord,
weep.
Let them say, ‘Spare your people, O Lord,
 and do not make your heritage a
mockery,
 a byword among the nations.
Why should it be said among the peoples,
 “Where is their God?”’

Psalm 51:1-17

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
judgement. 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.

2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:2

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Concerning Almsgiving

"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

"So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Concerning Prayer

'And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Concerning Fasting

"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Concerning Treasures

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

