

**Lessons for Ash Wednesday**

**March 1, 2017**

Psalm 51:1-13 ~ *David sincerely confessed his sin, trusted confidently, and rejoiced in God's forgiveness.*

Joel 2:12-19 ~ *The prophet Joel urged the people to return wholeheartedly to the Lord.*

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10 ~ *God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might be holy.*

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 ~ *Alms, fasting, and prayer are treasures God has placed in our heart for others.*

**GATHERING THE TEXTS: A New Heart for the Lord**

The lessons for today remind us that God looks into our hearts to see what others cannot see. The people of Joel's day thought they could buy time with an outward show of repentance, but God warned them of his judgment until their hearts would be renewed. St. Paul described how our hearts are changed; not by our own doing, but by the gracious action of God who let Jesus take on our sin so that we may become righteous in his sight. Jesus' own directions for prayer and fasting move us from an outward show to an examination of our inward motives.

**PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE:** O Lord, give me a new heart. Convince me of my sin that I may stand convicted by your Law to seek forgiveness in your Grace. Renew my life by your Spirit and give me strength to stand in the convictions of your Word as I witness to your Love through your Son, Jesus Christ, my Savior. Amen.

**STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT:** From a heart made new through Christ Jesus, gifts of goods and love flow freely from God's redeemed people. Alms, fasting, and prayer do not seek or bring about God's grace; they are the joyful result of knowing our sin is forgiven.

**OFFERING PRAYER:** O Lord, our wasted lives, renewed by grace!  
Our hearts, once stained by sin, now cleansed, made whole!  
Lord, grant the lost your love in us to trace.  
Bring them through Christ to heaven's goal. Amen.

**CONVICTION AND COMFORT:** Every day we do such a thorough job of covering up our sins and hiding our sinfulness from our neighbors and family that when it comes to confession, we don't see ourselves for what we are really worth – nothing; we are spiritually bankrupt! No wonder the people of Joel's day made a show of outward repentance but kept their hearts intact. Jesus urged, when it comes to alms, fasting, and prayers, do them in secret that they may come from the treasures of your heart. Only God can fill our hearts with the pure treasures of his grace by trading our sin for the righteousness of Christ Jesus.