

Ash Wednesday (2008) Scripture:

II Corinthians 5:14- 6:10 Stage/Altar set-up: envision "Paul" (member of the church) in clothes-of- the-time sitting at a table (w/stool) writing this letter to the Corinthians. As he "writes", he is actually reading his letter to our church members (in front of the Altar). (Blue flood light goes on...)

*"Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own.*

*Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at Christ that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore. Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with Christ gets a fresh start,... is created new. The old life is gone; a new life begins and flourishes! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through Christ our Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now:..... Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.*

*How? You say. In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God. Companions,.... as we are in this work with you, we beg you, please don't squander one bit of this marvelous life God has given us. God reminds us, "I heard your call in the nick of time; The day you needed me, I was there to help"*

*Well, ... now is the right time to listen, the day to be helped. Don't put it off; don't frustrate God's work by showing up late, throwing a question mark over everything we're doing. Our work as God's servants gets validated – or not—in the details. People are watching us as we stay at our post, alertly, unswervingly . . . in hard times, tough times, bad times; ....when we're beaten up, jailed and mobbed;.....working hard, working late, working without eating; with pure heart, clear head, steady hand;..... in gentleness, holiness, and honest love;..... when we're telling the truth, and when God's showing his power;..... when*

*we're doing our best setting things right;... when we're praised, and when we're blamed;... slandered, and honored;..... true to our word, though distrusted;..... ignored by the world, but recognized by God;..... terrifically alive, though rumored to be dead; ..... beaten within an inch of our lives, but refusing to die; ... immersed in tears, yet always filled with deep joy; ..... living on hand-outs, yet enriching many; ...having nothing, yet, having it all.*

*Dear, dear members in Christ, I can't tell you how much I long for you to enter this wide-open, spacious life. We didn't fence you in. The smallness you feel comes from within you. Your lives aren't small, but you're living them in a small way. I'm speaking as plainly as I can and with great affection. Open up your lives. Live openly and expansively!"*

Blue flood light goes out. "Paul" rolls up scroll and walks out. The Pastor now responds to Paul's letter:

"A Letter Back to Paul" II Corinthians 5:14-6:10

Rev. Judine Duerwaechter

"Greetings to you, Paul, our brother in Christ, from all of us here at St. Peter's in Kiel! Oh, how we have longed for a moment like this, to be able to offer you our thankfulness for your meaningful and difficult work in ministry. You have repeatedly set valuable examples for us as disciples of Christ here in Kiel—1/2 a world away. In learning of your coming, our elders, anxiously have gathered to study your letters more in order to prepare ourselves to greet and respond to you generously and appropriately as Christ calls us to.

In hearing your word today we are reminded of your sufferings for Christ; how you have endured beatings, imprisonment, sleepless nights, fasting, poverty in travel, tumult, and labors, and yet have kept serving! Your letters, and Luke's story in the book of Acts are a tribute to your work to our Lord and Savior. We admit, we read them with doubt, for the tragedies and sufferings you have endured are unbelievable. Many of *our* calamities pale in comparison; forgive us for not truly understanding.

But we wanted you to know! We know why you call us to look inside! Because that's where God and us—each one of us—are reconciled! Reconciliation is not anywhere outside of ourselves, but inside of us...And it's already happened, we simply need to get to it, to **reveal** it, to **unveil** it.

We realized that we're just like the statue of David that Michelangelo sculpted (By-the-Way[BTW]: he's this famous artist that lived about 1400 years after you). Michelangelo said the "David" already existed in the marble; he simply chipped away the excess pieces.

**This** is what our Lenten season is all about! (Oh, yeah, another "BTW": we've created this season in the church called Lent, where for 40 days [you understand the symbolism in that, don't you? ☺] we take a "time out" to identify where our hearts are *not* in right relationship

with God—what we need to be chipping away at to reveal, unveil the Real Christ-person we are.) This is why we're so thrilled to have you here with us. We wanted to share with you our awareness that we know "*we're in here somewhere!*," we're working on it. We're not going to squander our lives, we're not going to wait for a better time to look within or begin again...we're going to do it now! because Salvation **is now!** We're going to be the ambassadors you've written about some 2000 years ago. We're going to represent, not ourselves, but Christ. That's what we're going to find when we look within. The Christ-person you found on the road to Damascus, the Christ-person **you used** to endure your sufferings throughout your ministry, and the Christ-person you died to in both life and death.

Paul, we know how prayer has been a significant means of living and communicating with God for you. You have used prayer as a means to go beyond conversation with God into Communion with God. How else could you have gone on?

This Lenten season we'd like to honor your means of prayer-life as we too seek to know the Christ more deeply...as we too seek to "rest in God," to be still, with a silent mind to hear God's still Voice. We ask you to join with us now in a time of meditation, a time of centering prayer. We know how prayer bonds us as members of Christ's church. We have become friends and love each other deeply. Join us Paul, please, as we learn to go within using the means of prayer."

We begin our centering prayer by sitting comfortably, our backs straight, our shoulders relaxed. We close our eyes and take a deep breath, slowly releasing it. We ask the Holy Spirit to bless and inspire us with a sacred word, one that may have much personal meaning. Examples would be: God, Jesus, Father, Mother, Abba, Mary, Amen, or Love, Listen, Peace, Mercy, Let Go, Silence, Stillness, Faith, or Trust.

With our chosen sacred word we consent to allowing God's presence within. We introduce our sacred word inwardly as gently as laying a feather on a piece of cotton. If thoughts of the day or issues at hand come into your mind seeking to interrupt or take over, return ever so gently to your sacred word. Thoughts are to be absent; our sacred word is used to gently guide them away and we return to silence. We are seeking an atmosphere of silence. (Complete silence in the church for as long as possible.)

(Prayer to bring us out of our centering: ) Most Holy God, we are asking to become more and more like You, know to us in the gift of Jesus. Bless us this Lenten season with the gift of silencing our minds in order to hear You, as You hear us now in praying (with words) the prayer that Jesus taught us: "Our Father..."

(Imposition of Ashes)