Dear Christ Followers at Faith and Hope,

It might have snuck up on you, but today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of our Lenten journey to the Cross. While we are still not meeting in person for an Ash Wednesday Service, I wanted you to encourage you to take a few moments to begin Lent in a prayerful way. Perhaps these personal reflections will spark your own reflections. You may even want to find some form of ashes to do your own Ash Wednesday experience. Just a note: don’t use fireplace ashes as they will burn your skin. I would suggest something else like a little dab of jelly or chocolate sauce as alternatives that you could easily form a cross on your forehead. Focus on the Cross not the stickiness of the alternatives. Below you will find some of my personal reflections as well as a link to the 2020 Community Ash Wednesday Service that the Canal Winchester Ministerial Association has made available.

***My Ash Wednesday Reflection:*** *As we have trudged our way through this year of pandemic, I have at times found my heart almost numb. I have tried to stay alert and alive through prayer and journaling, walks at Metro Parks, reading and study, and interacting with folks online. Even so, I this year has taken its toll on me and the numbness, I suspect, is its impact. As I begin this Lenten journey to the Cross, I name my heart’s numbness before God. (Maybe this pandemic year has had some effect on you as well). Lent invites me to see my heart as it truly is before God. Something is out of sync and I feel it in my heart.*

*I mourn this. Mourning is at the heart of Ash Wednesday and the Lenten season. Mourning, while painful, does something wonderful to us. As David Paul Tripp shares,* ***“These sad realities that cause us to weep also cause us to cry out for help, rescue, forgiveness, healing, and deliverance from our Redeemer.”***

*May the mourning at the heart of Ash Wednesday has helped me see myself with greater clarity. But it also reminds me, I have Someone to cry out to for help and grace. I pray that will be your experience as well.*

*Along the way, the way to the Cross, we will discover that Lent is truly a gift from God:*

* *Lent is about remembering the suffering and sacrifice of the Savior.*
* *Lent is about confessing our ongoing battle with sin.*
* *Lent is about fasting, and not just from food; we willingly and joyfully let go of the things in this world that have too much a hold on us.*
* *Lent is about giving ourselves in a more focused way to prayer.*

*Join me this Ash Wednesday, as we cry out to our Redeemer for help that we so urgently need from the only One who can provide it. Pastor Clark*

***Ash Wednesday Prayer***

*Jesus come and save us,*

*We are but dust,  
We are like ashes,  
but you can touch our unclean souls.*

*Jesus come and forgive us,*

*Our hearts are heavy,  
Our burdens are great,  
Cleanse us with the water of life.*

*Jesus come and heal us,*

*Restore our sight,  
Teach us truth,  
Speak to us words that bring us wholeness.*

*Jesus touch us with your heart of love,*

*Cleanse us with the water of life,  
Restore our sight that we may see,  
Teach us truth that we may lead Godly lives.*

*~ written by Christine Sine*

Link to 2020 Ash Wednesday Service.

<https://vimeo.com/506493958/50d0c6b895>

P.S. Allow me to accent several things:

1. This Sunday, we start a new Lenten Worship Series entitled ***“Seven Words to the Cross”*** which provide a fascinating vantage point to see the human heart’s response to Jesus’ crucifixion. You can listen to these online.
2. We will resume worshiping in person on ***Sunday March 7 at Hope at 10:00 AM***. I know I am weary with the current restrictions on in person worship; how I long to worship our Lord together. Wonderful music, Lenten Communion, and inspiration from God’s Word await. All our precautions for safely gathering will be in place.
3. We are offering a Lenten Small Group Bible Study called ***He Chose the Nails*** by Max Lucado. Check out the weekly news pieces to get the details. We will begin Thursday February 25 7:00-8:15 PM (and meet for five weeks) at Faith UMC to use their big screen for the video portion before we share a heart-stirring discussion and experience. Email me ASAP if you are interested.