

## Two Litanies

### For Ash Wednesday or the First Sunday of Lent Reflecting the Impact of COVID-19

Katrina J. Olson

katolson5318@gmail.com – katolson.com

#### Litany #1: Infectious Ashes

Over 2 million deaths worldwide due to COVID-19

Over 425,000\* deaths in the United States\* due to COVID-19

Over 8,000\* deaths in Tennessee\* due to COVID-19

Over 700\* deaths in Nashville\* due to COVID-19

(Name those in or connected to your congregation who have died due to COVID-19 if any)

We have felt a sharp pain of loss.

#### **Join our sorrow, O God of dust and breath.**

*(Pause—deep breath in and out)*

The ashes that mark this season of Lent seem almost infectious as COVID-19 ravages our world.

This virus has spread like poison, showing us how fragile we are,

and we have felt its painful sting, reminded that we are dust.

New realities weave into our lives:

Shut downs have cost some their jobs and made others excruciatingly difficult.

Grandchildren have visited grandparents through glass windows.

Birthdays and graduations have been celebrated in drive-by processions.

Holidays typically filled with noise and joy shrank into near silence.

Our worship spaces have been reduced to the glow of a computer screen.

We are sequestered, solitary, and waiting.

God, you breathed life into dust, uniting Spirit with clay,  
but these days we are feeling more dusty than ever.

#### **Hear our pain, O God of dust and breath.**

*(Pause—deep breath in and out)*

2 Corinthians 4: 7-12

But we have this treasure in jars of clay

to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed;

perplexed, but not in despair;

persecuted, but not abandoned;

struck down, but not destroyed.

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus,

so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.  
For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake,  
so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.  
So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

**Lend us hope, O God of dust and breath.**

*(Pause—deep breath in and out)*

Stir within us, Holy Spirit!

Remind the dust within our bones that it was shaped into being for a purpose.

Spur our gaze onward to the cross and challenge us to join in the death of Christ,  
knowing that no violence, no virus, no challenge we face  
can destroy Christ's hope that lives in and among us.

May we be infectiously hopeful as we carry this gospel message with us,  
spreading God's unfailing love and peace in a world of ash.

**Send us out, O God of dust and breath.**

*(Pause—deep breath in and out)*

Potential Songs of Response or Meditation

- Christ Lives in Me—Performed by *Rend Collective*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjD30bbABis>
- How Far We've Come—Performed by *I Am They*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-1-WSaJakc>
- Beams of Heaven—by Charles Tindley (LUYH#454)
- My Life Flows On in Endless Song—by Robert Lowry (LUYH#443)
- Blessed Be Your Name—by Matt and Beth Redman (LUYH #343)

*\*These numbers rapidly change and they reflect the time that I wrote this litany as well as my own location. You will need to adjust these places and figures to reflect your own congregational location and time of use.*

*\*\*Not all churches use responsive readings or are drawn to more informal liturgy. This litany is created to adapt to these circumstances, so that you can take out the bold responses and divide the sections into different voices. However, I would encourage you to keep the breaks, let the words sit, and give people space to breath. If you have musicians able to contribute short musical breaks that add to the flow rather than disturb it, have them contribute at these points.*

*\*\*\*Whether together in person or still worshiping at home, a congregation open to using body postures could use these examples to remained physically engaged throughout the litany:*

*Section one (beginning through "join our sorrow"): seated, hands gripping knees, hunched shoulders, head down*

*Section two (through "hear our pain"): seated, face forward, right fist over heart*

*Section three (through "lend us hope"): seated, face up, hands stretched out in front with palms turned upward*

*Section four (through "send us out"): standing, face and chest up, arms at sides, relaxed*

## Litany #2: Returning to Creation

Voice 1:

We start this Lenten journey with heavier hearts this year:  
as the ravages of hatred mar our landscape in both word and action,  
and a virus sweeps through our world, claiming millions of lives.  
We are exhausted, lonely, stressed, bored, stuck, frustrated...\*  
It all reminds us that we are dust.

Voice 2:

Because you...ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you,  
'You must not eat from it,'  
Cursed is the ground because of you;  
through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.  
It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.  
By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food  
until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken;  
for dust you are and to dust you will return. (Genesis 3: 19)

Voice 1 (or 3) with despair:

We are dust.

Response:

**And walk to the cross with fragile humility,  
knowing our humanity.**

Voice 1:

We start the journey to the cross with heavy hearts but still hope!  
We walk with Christ towards Jerusalem knowing where this path leads.  
We walk with Christ, whose final step into death will crush the head of the serpent,  
whose piercing bite and vicious poison has felt sharper in this past year.

Voice 2:

So the Lord God said to the serpent,  
"Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals!  
You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. (Genesis 3:14)

Voice 1 (or 3) with hope:

We are dust

Response:

**Yet we walk to the cross with sure steps,  
knowing that Christ has won.**

Voice 1:

We start this Lenten journey with heavy hearts  
but still hope that we can bring light into the darkness.  
Our dusty selves have been uniquely formed  
by the God who rules over every particle of this earth.  
The Holy Spirit beats in our very chest,  
enabling us carry our hope into a world of despair.  
Our dusty selves are chosen, blessed, and challenged to live out the gospel message,  
Especially in times like these.

Voice 2:

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground  
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,  
and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:17)

Voice 1 (or 3) with determination: We are dust

Response:

**And we walk to the cross with purposeful steps,  
dust shaking in our bones,  
Knowing that we are uniquely created  
to reflect Christ's loving hope into the world.**

Potential Songs of Response or Meditation

Great are You Lord—Performed by *All Sons & Daughters*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHz0w-HG4iU>

We Are People on a Journey- by Gregg DeMey (LUYH#142)

Total Praise—by Richard Smallwood (LUYH#420)

In Christ Alone—by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend (LUYH#770)

What the Lord Has Done in Me—by Reuben Morgan (LUYH#800)

*\*Add or adjust the descriptors to match the specific struggles of your worshipping family and surrounding community. You might even have people stand and shout an emotion if you are gathering or write emotions into a group chat if gathered online.*