Preparing the fire

Begin by ripping cardboard boxes into a smaller pieces about the size of a credit card. If cardboard is thick, you might peel apart the layers to reduce the thickness.

Upon these cardboard pieces, each family member is invited to write or draw a sorrow from the past year: deaths, losses, missed opportunities, grudges, frustrations, sins, pains. Use as many pieces of cardboard as needed to capture all that might be in the way of possibility.

Once all of these sorrows are recorded, place them into the chosen container for burning. Rip up the mail that was headed to the recycling bin and add those bits as extra fuel to the fire. Pray these words together before sparking a match to light the fire.

FIRE AND ASHES

This is 2021

Ashes are what is left after the fire. Nothing will become of them. They are swept up and disposed. That’s how it usually is, but nothing is as it usually is.

Lent begins, again, with the joys and hopes of last year charred and burned. Lent always begins like this. It always leans into the hope of renewal where what has been reduced to ashes will find new life. So we begin this year to prepare for what will come.

Getting ready

Before you gathering outside for this sacred moment, gather the following items together:

- container for burning: charcoal grill, large cast iron dutch oven for camping or stovetop, terra-cotta flower pot lined with aluminum foil, a fire pit or a large coffee can
- cardboard box or two or three (thinner cardboard will burn faster)
- mail headed for the recycle bin
- markers, pens or pencils
- matches
- cooking oil
- small bowl
- wooden spoon
- pitcher or large jar full of water

O God, your earth suffers and crumbles into ruin like ashes in a fire. Our hope has been consumed so that we come to this fire to find the courage to rise from the ashes. O God, give us a clean heart. Amen.

By Elsa Anders Cook
TEND TO THE FIRE

There is something so soothing about watching a fire. Allow yourselves to be present to this moment noticing the colors and sounds. Feel the heat warming your body. Poke at the fire, as needed, to make sure that all of those sorrows and frustrations are consumed.

If music is what feels needed, navigate to YouTube to listen to The Porter's Gate's song *Illuminate the Shadows* or by clicking this link. As the fire fades, turn your hearts to hear these words of hope from the prophet Isaiah.

**QUENCHING WITH WATER**

Dose the last embers of the fire with water from the pitcher. These waters recall the waters of baptism and renewal. It is with this water that we not only remember grace but that God blesses with possibility.

You might share with one another what feels possible right now. Or what you each hope will be possible in the weeks ahead.

**MAKE AND SHARE ASHES**

Spoon some of the damp, charred remains of your sorrows into the bowl. There may still be large pieces and it may well be still hot so be careful.

Use the spoon to break down the ashes into dust. When dust is all that remains, stir in a drop or two of oil to make a paste.

**The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.**

Isaiah 58:11-12, New Revised Standard Version

Add more oil until it seems possible to dip your finger into the ashes and smear a cross upon another's forehead. With your finger, mark each forehead with a sign of the cross and repeat these words.

**You are dust and to dust you shall return but you will always be beloved by God.**

If you feel moved to respond when receiving the ashes, you can say Amen.

**BLESSING**

You might choose to close with music so that you find your way again to YouTube to find Common Hymnal's song *Rise* or by clicking this link. Or you might join hands and share in the blessing.

**You are in Christ and you are part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and new things bloom! All of these new wonders are from God, who brings us together to share in the work of possibility. May it be so.**