

Isaiah 58: 6-10

**This, rather, is the fasting that I wish:
releasing those bound unjustly,
untying the thongs of the yoke;
Setting free the oppressed,
breaking every yoke;
Sharing your bread with the hungry,
sheltering the oppressed and the homeless;
Clothing the naked when you see them,
and not turning your back on your own.**

**Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your wound shall quickly be healed;
Your vindication shall go before you,
and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer,
you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!**

**If you remove from your midst
oppression,
false accusation,
and malicious speech;
If you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted;**

**Then light shall rise for you in the darkness,
and the gloom shall become for you like midday.**

Meditation

Every Monday I go to what is called a “Lectionary” to see the readings of the day...
The Lectionary is a schedule of readings used in many Protestant
and every Catholic church around the world...
so this reading from Isaiah is being read this day--- world wide
and I have to wonder how many are taking it seriously...

In this reading, the “I” is God speaking...
So when we hear in the opening line:

“This, rather, is the fasting that I wish,”
is coming from God...

It is God who wants us to break the bonds of oppression,
to share our bread with the hungry
to shelter the homeless and to clothe those who are naked.

Earlier in the chapter,
God says to his people that all of their religious sacrifices and rituals
don’t really mean all that much...
He isn’t interested in their ‘burnt sacrifices’...
but God wants to know if oppression, malicious speech and false accusations
have been eliminated from their lives...

Could there be any more relevant reading for our time?

Sure, some people might hear this reading and say: see our problems aren’t new...
that’s the way it has always been...
that’s the way it will always gonna be....

**But we, over 2,500 years later
we who call ourselves Christian ought not take that cynical, hopeless approach...**

Why?

Well, simply because that is not the essence of Christianity.

The foundation of Christian Faith is trust.

Trust in the Goodness, the Faithfulness and the Unconditional,

Boundary-less Love of God..

Which leads to hope and joy and peace.....

in this Life, in all the circumstances...in good times and in tough times...

Jesus didn't succumb to bitterness, resentment or cynicism..

Because he lived in a hope that was based in the truth of who he knew his God to be...

A God whose power was greater than any human army or government,

because it was power that changed people on the inside...

it changed people hearts and when your heart is transformed,

you naturally change your mind and then your life....

and the world changes...it can do nothing else.

Jesus knew the wisdom that all real, everlasting change first starts

in here.....(POINT TO YOUR HEART)....

and then everything else flows....

If we don't change our hearts first...

then the cycles of evil just keep going round and round...

first from this side...then from that side...

then the oppressed become the oppressors...

and then it flips when the other side comes into Power.

Jesus knew that. That's why he didn't rally the people to physically fight the Romans...

**Gandhi knew that that why he didn't rally his people to physically fight the British...
Martin Luther King knew that...that is why he didn't encourage his people
to physically fight against the racists and the bigots...**

**Their strategy wasn't based in a logical awareness of who had the
most ammunition....**

Their strategy wasn't based on who held political power...

Their strategy was based on Love...

Love of their enemies,

Love for themselves,

Love for the future generations on both sides.

Our world right now is caught in a tsunami of fear.

People everywhere are trying to figure out

how to keep their children safe...

trying to figure out how to keep a roof over their heads

and are trying to figure out how to put food on their family's table...

**It is no coincidence that some variation of "Do Not Be Afraid" appears in the Bible
365 times...**

While we all want the same things,

we have differing opinions on how to get there...

**the yoke of oppression, false accusation, and malicious speech
are all tactics of fear...**

those who employ them are caught up in the Great lie that

there is not enough for everyone,

**Those who oppress use malicious speech and falsely accuse others
due so because they are afraid...**

It is said that we do things either out of Love or out of Fear.

**I encourage you to look within yourself and see why you hold the opinions
that you do ...on any topic....**

do you live out of fear or from love?

**Do you speak from the ground of Love which opens our hearts and minds to the other
or do you speak from the ground of fear which closes our hearts and minds down,
makes them smaller and more suspicious?**

We live in pivotal times, important times, and dare I say transformative times.

The consequences of our actions and choices will affect generations yet to be born...

Our emotional, physical and spiritual health shapes our thoughts and our actions...

Therefore...the most essential, most important task before us, is this:

Do we live in and from Fear

or do we live in and from Love?

This is the most important question of our time...

A long time ago, I heard a wise woman say:

Be careful what you fight against...because you become what you fight.

If you fight against violence, injustice, and hatred

you become that only from the other side of the ideological fence.

That is living in fear....

But if you fight FOR something...if you fight for kindness, integrity, justice, ...

that is what you become....

That is living in Love....

Yes, humanity has been fighting against hunger, poverty, injustice from the get-go...

It does seem to be the way things have always been...

but perhaps, perhaps... it is because we have always fought against those things...

So, my friends, now, is time to fight FOR:

bread for the hungry

shelter for the homeless

It is time to fight for integrity and truthfulness...

It is time to live in and through LOVE.....

**and It is in that way of being, of living, of acting, of speaking
that we shall see our**

**light shall rise for us in the darkness,
and our gloom shall become like midday.**

**and for that we,
and our children,
will be able to say: THANK YOU!! amen.**