

### **Isaiah 58:6-9a**

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, 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.

### Sermon

The people were wondering if God had forgotten them. They were wondering why God didn't seem to respond to their prayers or to the challenges that they were facing. They started to wonder if they were doing it wrong. "Day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. 'Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice.'"

The people of that time had fallen into a practice of empty rituals and hollow practices. They fasted from food or drink, yet still oppressed the servant and the prisoner. They humbled themselves in prayer and sacrifice, yet as they brought their offering to the altar, they walked by the hungry and never gave them a look, they walked by the tattered and weathered and hid from the social challenges of their family, community, nation, and world.

And most Sunday mornings, hundreds of thousands, even millions of Christians in our family, community, nation, and world, make their way to worship - some drive cars or trucks or vans, while some take buses or trains, and still countless put on tattered sandals or shoes and jump on bikes or walk five, ten, twenty miles to be in worship. But for too many of us, we have become Isaiah 58 people. We worship with our time, one hour a week. We worship with rituals of bread and cup, with song and prayer, with listening to the word and the message from the pulpit. But then we go home.

We drive or ride or walk past the prisons and past the hungry. We turn on the news and watch, wishing things might change but not believing that it ever will, and surely we have no role to play in that change. We look at the pain and suffering in the worlds, we look at the challenges of our own nation, our own community, our own family - war and terror, refugees displaced, disease and natural disasters - racism and an over imprisoned population, polarized politics and people, declining religions affiliation - rise in opioid addiction and overdose, decline in jobs, broken homes and children being

raised in poverty - cancer and heart disease, strokes and chronic pain and the list goes on - we look at all the brokenness and we ask, where is God in the midst of it all?

Some go as far as to indicate God's wrath. God is made because of the Muslims, because of the gays, because of the wickedness of one people or another. And we are Isaiah 58 people, looking to put blame on anyone other than ourselves.

Is not this the fast that I choose - to fight injustice, to free the prisoner, to feed the hungry, to cloth the tattered and naked, to give dignity to the disgraced, welcome to the stranger, loved to the lonely, warmth to the isolated, a smile to the unnoticed, a hug to the broken hearted, a shoulder to cry on to the grieving, a sense of hope to the hopeless and depressed, and a presence to the sick and dying.

That is what today is about, not a one off day of caring, a check box for our year, but a constant reminder that God has called us to be the change in this world that we are looking for, and when we work to make the little and large changes, it is God who stands beside us, who works through us, and it is with God's love that we begin to see a better day. Today, we worship with our hands and feet, our love and devotion, our minds and bodies. But this is the true fast that God desires in our everyday life, this is just the beginning, if we are open to God's spirit moving in us and through us. Thanks be to God for the opportunity to serve. Amen