

## **11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost August 24 2025**

### **Isaiah 58:9b-14; Luke 13:10-17**

This part of the book of Isaiah is written in the aftermath of the Babylonian exile and perhaps the beginning of the return. It references the fact that the faithful, for about 70 years, were fasting twice a year to commemorate the fact they lost their home and their king. It was their attempt to move God to act. Their thought was, if we fast, then God will show up and we see the effects of that! It is a proforma, if/then, kind of thing.

But God's response through the prophet is to disabuse them of their notion. Gang, you want to see me (I'm already here btw) the fast you are doing won't work. Here is the fasting I want: fast from binding people with communal injustice, that which is opposite of the righteousness of the reign of God. Instead- set them free from those bonds. Fast from those things that bind people into circumstances that break them into pieces. The practices that led to people being in debt and being forced into indentured servitude. Instead, set these people free!

God does not require you fast from bread and water. That you fast from your phone or social media, instead fast from overindulgence by sharing your bread with the hungry (because are there any hungry people in the reign of God?) Fast from your abundance by bringing the poor who are homeless into your home. To go into your full closets and cover the naked. To not hide yourself from your own flesh (the commonality of all who bear the image of God). To not be invisible to the poor, oppressed, broken nor to not let them be invisible to you.

The promise of God through the Prophet is that when you fast in this way- then you will see that God is near. Then shall there be light and healing in your life. This is the consequence of living according to the reign of God- you shall see God and God's reign. If you don't live this way, then you won't. Doesn't mean it's not there, just means you won't see it.

If you get rid of those things that enslave people, refrain from gestures of contempt and scorn towards others (not treating them as those created in the image of God), get rid of speaking that which is diametrically opposed to the reign of God.

If you offer to the hungry your nephesh (soul) and the nephesh (soul) of the hungry you satisfy then shall light dawn! Then shall your gloom be like noon-day!

Do these things and God will guide you always- satisfy your dry places, and you shall be a garden with a spring of water that will not fail. You will produce fruit! Abundantly!

If you refrain from walking all over the sabbath to do your own thing. If you call the sabbath a delight and honor it, then you shall delight in God and God in you. Then you shall see.

The if/then is not about God and getting God to do things, but about you.

The sabbath is not for God, but for you. In the exile- away from the temple- sabbath, not sacrifice, became the way to worship. As one of our members pointed out on Wednesday, it is the great leveler because all take the day off: the slave and the slave owner. All must trust that God will provide daily bread. It is a

reminder that during the 40 years in the wilderness God did provide enough for each day but also for that extra day, the sabbath when no gathering was done. In this way- all are reminded that they share kinship with one another. That all are created in the image of God. Sabbath is a reminder of our sharedness- and this leads to us making sure that the hungry are fed, the homeless sheltered, the naked clothed. That the societies we live in are just towards the poor, the widow the orphan, the alien in our land- because as the sabbath reminds us- you were once a people without a place, too. And, as the world shows us- you're only one disaster away from being back there.

Here is an interesting question raised by this text and our text from Luke. Is the faithfulness, the righteousness, the right relationship of a people with God based on the Ten Commandments being posted in their classrooms, the number of people in their worship on Sunday, or is it by how many hungry people there are among them, how many without shelter, how many who are being broken into pieces by the way in which that society has structured themselves?

Time and again in the Hebrew scriptures the people begin to confuse their worship with their faithfulness. And time and again God sends God's prophets to remind them- nope! Micah- what does God require, not burnt offerings even in the thousands, or grain offerings in the tens of thousands, or even of your firstborn. God requires that you do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God. The greatest commandment- Jesus says to love God with all that you are and love your neighbor as yourself. This, the scribe in Mark agrees, is more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. And in this recognition Jesus says he is not far from the reign of God!

The leader of the synagogue seems to believe that just showing up and following the rules is what God requires. This is what frustrates Jesus, because it is a narrow interpretation of the sabbath. The sabbath is for setting people free! Free from whatever binds them, bends them over, makes them invisible to us so that our eyes pass over them, so that we don't see them. Because to see them means we are to act! I know this. I confess there are times I have not seen because I didn't want to be bothered. Because I was tired and had enough. Or because I was afraid.

Jesus reminds us in the gospel of Mark that we as humans are not made for the sabbath, but that sabbath was made for us. That this day was made for our benefit. To free us- from labor, from the illusion that our wealth (or our lack of it) is our doing, from thinking that we run the world. It is for the loosing of bonds, the breaking of illusions. Sabbath is for the freeing of a woman who has suffered for 18 years from her illness, her invisibility socially, her exclusion, her pain, her affliction. Something that the local population would probably have been inclined to think she brought on herself- as that was the general view of illness in that day and age.

Note that Jesus calls the leader of the synagogue and all who thought as he did hypocrites. Two faced actors. He called someone else that recently. Do you remember who? The crowds gathered to hear him speak. You two faced folk. You know how to understand what the weather will bring, but you don't know enough to read the truth of what I bring? You two faced folk, you know enough to do right by your ox or donkey because it benefits you, but you don't see how much more you ought to do this for this woman this day?

As one commentator put it, they are hypocrites because they do not understand God's purpose and are unable to discern accurately the meaning of Scripture, and that makes their piety a sham. So stuck in their worship, they don't see God.

How do we avoid that fate? Perhaps it is to be like Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus to be reminded that what sustains us is not what we do, but what is done to us. That it has already been God's great pleasure to have us in God's reign. That each week when we gather in the presence of God's Word and the Sacraments, that God has promised to be present in, we receive the Holy Spirit that continues to transform our lives.

We come to be freed from bondage to the idea that what we do will liberate us. We come to be freed from all those things in our lives that bend us over, that make us invisible, that keep us from community with God and with others. And Jesus has come to set us free. To call us to him, to lay his hands upon us, and to say, "You are set free from your ailment."

What binds you today? What holds you fast? From what can Jesus set you free today? Because that is what he came to do! As his mother Mary said in her hymn of praise to God Jesus came to- cast down the mighty and uplift the humble, to fill the hungry with good things. In Luke 4 in another synagogue Jesus (Lk 4:26) announces his mission, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. To proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

This is what Jesus came to do, it is what God wants to do in your life! To free us from our stinkin' thinkin' about what is happening here today. That we are not doing this so God will do that. We do this, so God will free us to go and love our neighbor! And when we love our neighbor the gloom of our life will disappear! Then our healing will accelerate, then our light shall break forth in dawn.

Jesus has come to see us! IF you feel invisible or unnoticed in a world what struggles to pay attention to anyone or anything, remember: Jesus sees you. Those who Jesus sees, Jesus calls to him. Those who Jesus sees, Jesus frees. Like the woman in our reading, you too can stand up straight.

Jesus has come to help us to see! Not only to see those around us who are invisible, but to see the truth- that God is already with us! That the reign of God is already here! And when we live that way- then we can see it!

Jesus has come to love us from death to life again. To show open our eyes and show us the way. A way not filled with gloom, rules, strife. But one filled with light, love, compassion, mercy, joy. Jesus has come to bring us peace, which includes healing and brings a wholeness into our lives that none other can bring.

Jesus has come. Thanks be to God.