

As I write my thoughts today it is Ash Wednesday and we are still iced in — unbelievable cold spell! My friends from Florida are rubbing it in. By the time **you're** reading this I hope the buttercups on the creek bank are blooming. One can hope.

One of the Lectionary Texts for today is Isaiah 58:1-12...

58:1 Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins.

58:2 Yet 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.

58:3 "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers.

58:4 Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high.

58:5 Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

58:6 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?

58:7 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?

58:8 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.

58:9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,

58:10 if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.

58:11 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.



58:12 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.



I am reminded that God is not interested in platitudes and formalities. *Ritual is for pointing us to a deeper reality, thus in turn allowing that reality to transform us.* Ritual is to be a practice not simply for the sake of the ritual itself, but a practice that points us to the deeper reality behind the ritual. For example, Communion is to point us to the reality of Christ — His love, presence, sacrifice, deliverance; the past and the future invading the present in the moment of communion. It is to remember/connect us with the person and work of Christ. Then we are transformed by the very presence of Christ in and around us. Communion is never simply to say we

had communion. The same is true of fasting. Isaiah points that out.

God is interested in reality, results, and restoration. **Don't** just discuss it; do it.

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What kind of sacrifice (and not just during Lent) does God desire? He desires righteousness, justice, mercy, acts of kindness, love, and care for others. These actions always call for us to **“fast.”** We may need to fast time, money, convenience, or even our opinion.

But, notice what happens: God will bless you — both before and after. He blesses us beforehand so we have the resources to **“do it.”** Then, He blesses us after we **“do it.”** God is so good!

Lent is the time we allow God to search us, challenge us, and transform us. This is for us — both personally and as a community of faith. It is not simply a ritual. It is a reality. Do it!

At the time of this writing, I'm pondering what God wants me to *do* through Lent in order to put myself in a place where I can hear Him more clearly. And, I know from experience the transformation

God does in me is not simply for the duration of the ritual of Lent, but for the deeper reality of daily life.

My prayer in this Lenten Season (COVID and all) is that the Ritual will lead to a Deeper Reality through which we, and our world, will be eternally transformed. One can hope!