

Friday, February 8th

Isaiah 58:1-9

Psalm 51

Matthew 9:10-17

The Israelites fasted with sack cloth and ashes but ignored the poverty in their midst... They sought God and delighted to know God's ways as if they actually practiced righteousness. They did not. They fasted and quarreled, and they oppressed their workers.

These readings speak to me of miscues and miscommunication...of dissonance. Of saying one thing and doing another — of allowing contradictions to sit in our midst mindlessly...with ease...

I've read these scriptures numerous times in preparing for today, but only tonight well into preparing my notes, was I taken with the experience of God's own dissonance with how things were with Israel and the urgency with which God speaks to Isaiah. "*Shout out! Don't hold back,*" says God to Isaiah. Tell them about their rebellion... their sins. But it is not for sin alone.

It matters to God that the Israelites were mindless to what they were doing and to what God wanted for them. God observes that their only disconnect seems to be in not understanding why their worship and fasting has so little affect. They long for God but God does not seem near....so

God gave Isaiah some real guidance to pass on.... *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...and so forth...and then you shall call, and the Lord will answer...

God tells us what brings God near...and how to fast...

I am reminded again that God, and Christ in the Gospel, long for us to be in communion with

God and one another. I am reminded again that we one body. That when one person suffers we

all suffer. God longs for us to “get that” and to act accordingly with one another. To feed the hungry, to loose the bonds of injustice... to share our bread with the hungry... to not hide ourselves from one another...

Worship and justice making go together. Reconciliation and fasting belong together say the footnotes in my bible.

I am taken that God wanted Isaiah to bring all this up to Israel. That God did not want Israel to flounder on and wallow in their sin and brokenness but instead to create a true alternative community that is marked by compassion and mercy for one another, especially those who are most vulnerable and in need, especially those we would call the other, or the enemy however the Israelites or we may define that on a given day in our families, or here at St. C's, or in our jobs, in all the relationships and activities that comprise our lives.

That is the message too in the Gospel. Jesus gathers the moral and social outcasts, whomever we might want to make the outcast, and has dinner with them. Jesus lives the vision of Isaiah to create an inclusive community marked by compassion. He is the perfect model for us this Lent. And he tells us quite simply that this Lent and every day for that matter God desires mercy, not sacrifice. Mercy. Go land learn what that means Jesus says. I can mediate on that for all of Lent and still have just begun. Mercy not sacrifice. Mercy. Mercy.

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