

Prayer of Preparation: Gracious God, speak to us. Your servants are listening. *Amen.*

Isaiah 58 is getting us ready for Lent. It’s a blueprint for why we’re celebrating Lent and of what God is requiring of us as individuals and as a congregation. Before you get mad at me for the message, I want you to remember 2 relatively important things: first, this is Isaiah’s message and I’m the messenger, and second, I agree with the message. But here’s the best and real reason you need to listen: Jesus quoted Isaiah. When we read that Jesus is quoting scripture, Jesus is quoting Isaiah. Jesus knew that Isaiah spoke God’s heart and wanted us to hear that God’s message had not changed...and that he fulfilled Isaiah’s message.

Listen to Isaiah 58 with a fresh ear: *“Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”* Isaiah is asking us if we know that the purpose of a fast is a sacrifice to God. Fasting is to set aside hunger to devote our full attention to praising and worshiping God. Fasting helps us focus on God, fasting helps us replace all the things with worship, and fasting helps us turn our attention away from ourselves and onto what God requires of us. According to Isaiah, fasting is one of the *best* tools we have in our worship arsenal.

Isaiah goes on to tell us what God wants us to see and do at the end of our fast: *...to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps 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?*

According to Isaiah, God wants us to loose the bonds of injustice: Grace UMC has chosen our injustice work to be feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. I’ve said it before, and I tell everyone I meet that Grace UMC does an amazing job with both. And I’d like you to do more. Isaiah is telling us that God is calling us to action for our own good and for the good of the world. Isaiah is telling us that God wants us to live out our faith in God in the *real* world in *real* world ways because our acts of faith are how we glorify God.

Isaiah is pushing us to realize that faith is a pattern of behavior: faith is not about what we say, faith is about how we live and what we do. Feeding the hungry? Good...feed more. Clothing the naked? Wonderful...clothe more. Every bit of food, every piece of clothing builds the kin-dom, reconciles the world to God, reconciles us to one another, and enables us to live worship inside *and* outside the sanctuary.

Here’s how Jesus describes us in Matthew’s gospel: *“You are the salt of the earth...”* Jesus describes us, who live out our faith in ministry and mission in the world, as salt. We are the people who, through our active faith, God’s kingdom good.

In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus also tells us: *“You are the light of the world.”* The “you” Jesus is referring to is the person you see in the mirror each morning. Each and every one of you are a light to everyone who sees you. We become a light to the world when we glorify God with our faith in action. We become a light to the world when we reveal God’s goodness to the world.

So I have 2 things I want you to do. The first is attend at least 1 of the Lenten worship services. We have 2 different set of services to attend: 1 is a Bible Study by Adam Hamilton on Tuesday mornings and the other is the regular Wednesday evening Lenten services. The schedules are on Facebook and in the weekly email and Grace Notes.

The 2nd thing is the 40 pieces of silver. Each year, Grace collects 40 pieces of silver at the end of Lent/Palm Sunday. I’d like everyone to participate. You don’t actually have to collect 40 pieces of silver; you

can write a check instead. The forty pieces of silver are a symbol of the forty days Jesus fasting and the fasting Isaiah is telling us about.

Those 40 pieces of silver represent we know, and are working towards, all God calls us be and what God requires us to do. Those pieces of silver, or checks, will represent 40 days of glorifying God. It's part of our call to action. It's part of Isaiah's call to defeat injustice and restore God's kin-dom. And it's over and above our regular giving as a sacrificial offering like Jesus sacrificed his life for us.

Response to the Word: *This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.* May our shining lights be a call to faith in action around the world. ***Amen.***