



Advent Reflection for Thursday, December 21, 2023

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Isaiah 58:6-14

Is not this the fast that I choose:
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?
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."
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
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.
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.
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.
If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath,
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;
if you call the Sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the Lord honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
serving your own interests or pursuing your own affairs;
then you shall take delight in the Lord,
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Today's Reflection is by Loyal Miles

A colleague at a previous job would fast every six months or so. Bottles of water, lemons, a shaker of cayenne pepper, and a honey bear would appear in the office's shared kitchen. He called it cleansing and swore that after the first day he felt more energetic than after any routine meal. His face would seem to thin a bit those days, but his skin took on a kind of gloss that did become something of a glow by the last day. I can't quite remember what tenor his speech had as the fast progressed but I think it was something of quietly frantic clarity.

For several months in high school, my father dragged me out of bed at dawn on Saturdays. He drove us across town to a warehouse in Wichita's industrial section. He had volunteered us to pack family boxes at a distribution center for food pantries across the city. It was ostensibly a punishment for what I'll characterize here as "teenage rebellion," but more than that it was a statement from my father that 1) the path I had begun the early stages of going down, not only in my choices but in my general deepening self-centeredness, was going to be vigorously contested, and 2) that this "contest" would not be played out solely in argument and consequence but in service to strangers whose lives I hadn't yet bothered to imagine.

Is not this the fast that I choose?

The lineage of the verb "to fast" seems to date back to prehistoric Germanic tribes. For them, to fast meant to hold firmly, an idea that got linked into their understanding of observance, e.g., to hold oneself firmly as a religious discipline (to fast). Somewhere through the centuries, the secular, day-to-day act of holding something firmly became something closer to our understanding of the verb to fasten, a word that's a helpful lens for me in framing today's reading: How would God choose that we become fastened to Him?

Isaiah's answer is exuberant and direct: welcome the oppressed, feed the hungry, house the homeless, and honor all that God has given, don't just keep going your own ways serving your

own interests. Two thousand years ago, then as now in a world in which so much individual and collective privilege and harm are rooted in “service” to self-interest, Jesus lives out Isaiah’s vision: He feeds, He heals, and He saves. Jesus teaches and models what we gather to practice every Sunday: Communion, a kind of fastening to each other so that we might be fastened together with Jesus, sharing in what Advent promises: new life, free from all that would hold us that is not God.



Loyal and his wife Lisa feel blessed to live a few blocks from Holy Apostles with their son Isaac (age 4) and daughter Frances (age 1). We're wishing everyone a Merry Christmas!