

Ash Wednesday
Sermon Text: Isaiah 58:1-12
Date Preached: February 17, 2010

Open our ears to hear your Word, O Lord. Open our hearts to receive your word. Open our hands to do thy will. In Jesus name. AMEN.

“Gee, what did we ever do before cell phones?” “I remember the days when we didn’t have video games.” Can you imagine how kids would be today if they didn’t have such games to get them through the boredom of endless snow days like we’ve experienced this year.

Could we live without the modern conveniences of the past 50 years? Absolutely! Would it be easy? Probably not. One could say that it would be a difficult sacrifice to make.

So, for the next forty days what fasting might we consider that not only is sacrificial, but additionally turns our focus back on God who in turn sends us out to love our neighbors? This is the challenge that is set before us in our readings this Ash Wednesday.

Now, one of the things you might notice is that the examples offered are not about food. I have done this deliberately for several reasons. First, is that I hope we can get over the stumbling block of some that

fasting is only connected to food. The biblical images of fasting and food are quite understandable. For many that was the overindulgence of the day.

Richard Foster in his book Celebration of Discipline writes, “More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us.” Thus, the things that may control us are far more numerous than the foods we eat.

Furthermore to allow something to control us is to say to God, “I don’t want you involved in this area of my life.” I doubt we ever think of the things we overindulge in to that degree, but that is part of our sin. We draw comfort in what we consume as opposed to drawing comfort and energy from God, failing to see that what He provides truly is enough.

There is of course a danger when it comes to fasting and it is a danger that is not connected to health issues that diabetics, pregnant women or others may face. That danger is one that uses fasting as a means of getting God to give us what we want.

This is why Jesus offers his instruction on fasting. It is not to boast or take pride in our fast. Rather, “...when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may not be seen by

others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

The point of fasting is to rely on the strength of God. When the point comes in the fast where we feel the temptation to give in is exactly the moment in which we call upon the Lord to sustain us. When we draw on the Lord to sustain us then we are more attune to the transforming power of God at work in our lives. This transformation leads us away from the object of our fast into the abundant feast of God’s Word.

The point of our fasting is to celebrate God drawing us deeper into life with him. That folks is the reward. It is not do this and you’ll get some candy. It is exchanging the chains that bind you for the freedom God gives us in the gospel. Such exchange can only be accomplished by God. It is Jesus who carries out this exchange.

Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. That is the gospel. No amount of our own sacrifice will begin to repay Christ for his love. His death is a merciful act for us. That is the God’s great gift to the world. This is the feast that satisfies beyond all earthly joys.

Sustained in this life giving abundant Word then also sets us free to feast with our neighbors. Such feasting

is reflected in setting loose the bonds of injustice, even knowing that there may be repercussions for doing so. Such feasting leads us to go out of our way to share bread with the hungry and to satisfy the needs of the afflicted.

These are the things God desires of his people. This is what it means to live out the words of our baptism, let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify you Father in heaven.

And God who calls us to this task will also equip us to accomplish it. “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.”

In our Lenten fast let us feast on the strength of the Lord to sustain us in our lives, as we love one another. AMEN.