

Devotions – March 1-7, 2020

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Sunday, March 1, 2020

Text: Matthew 4:23-24

So, when you are offering your gift at the altar, when you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, then come and offer your gift.

I have been pondering fasting for over a month. I think God keeps pushing me back to that subject. So, I have decided to explore what it means to me. The saddest thought is that I feel like I know what fasting ISN'T better than I know what it is.

Most people will say that fasting is going without food. Well, I know that is not true. Fasting may involve not eating but really it is controlling your food intake for the purpose of making your body ready for God to work with you. Re-read this scripture. Matthew is saying that your offering must start with your heart and soul. It does no good if you give harbor to hate. You have to get to the point where your offering is untainted by discord or resentment.

The primary reason for controlling your diet while fasting is to make sure that it does not interfere with your concentration. It is not abstaining from food. It is making your meals a worship experience intended to bring you to a physical state that allows God to reach you.

I once lead a retreat that concentrated on fasting. I began weeks ahead of time working with the cooks. We planned simple meals. Pure meals with no additives and only water or juice to drink. The food was not restricted in any way. In fact, it was always available. The difference was we provided areas where people could eat alone if they wished and areas where they could share food. We simply challenged people to eat prayerfully. Wow. What a difference that made!

In other words, we tackled some of the sources of our distraction before we tried to fast.

Prayer Thoughts: *Help me examine what keeps me distracted. Train me to prayerfully restructure my approach to interaction with God and my companions.*



Monday, March 2, 2020

Text: I Kings 19:11-13

(God) said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah? "

Many years ago, I went to a woman's retreat at a camp called Park of the Pines close to Petoskey. The only thing I remember was a woman who shared her experience with prayer. She told us that she became very frustrated with God. She said she was praying every hour of every day. Her prayers began to feel like nagging, and she didn't think God was listening. Finally she asked God what she needed to change. A clear message came to her. I think a profound message. God told her, "When you think I am not paying attention to you, consider the possibility that I am trying to speak, and YOU are not listening." Perhaps the silence is God waiting for us to be ready to listen.

When we prepare to fast, we need to be working toward the answer we seek. Getting rid of distraction is good. When we finally work our way to the silence, we need to be ready to listen.

Perhaps it was so meaningful to me because I had some of the same problems. I frequently give my problems to God and then grab them up again as I leave my place of prayer. I once nagged God unrelentingly about an important problem. Finally one night as I began my nag (I called it prayer), I was struck with a powerful sense of anger from God..... What he told me was that He had taken care of the problem and I would just have to wait until HIS time for it to happen. I ran away from that place. And you can bet money I did not bother God again. He did take care of the problem in his time. I am forever grateful that I did wait for his plan. One thing I have realized is that I was seeking one answer and done. God had a lifetime of growth and love ready for me.

I think Elijah expected God in the fire and wind. I think he would have been ready for God in the earthquake. I don't think he was quite ready for God to say, "What are you doing here?"

Fasting is a journey to - not an exercise in doing without.

Prayer thoughts: *Help me be honest in what I seek. God is ready for me - help me get ready for him. Why do I need to fast?*



Tuesday, March 3, 2020

Text: Malachi 4:8-10

Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, "How are we robbing you?" In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me - the whole

nation of you! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there might be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of Hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

I spent many years as a Special Ed teacher. One of the special stresses of a Special Ed teacher is IEP meetings. I started at a school that frequently held those meetings during the lunch hour. The first time I went through the cafeteria line I introduced myself to the cook who promptly jumped down my throat about expecting her to make allowances for these meetings. Since I did not expect that, I was a bit surprised. It was clear that my predecessor had a running battle about the duty of the school lunchroom to feed her.

I reassured the head cook that I would never ask her to save food for me. Every day, when I went through the line, I would complement the staff about the wonderful smell or the beautiful sunshine that came through the windows. I made sure they knew that I enjoyed the clean room and how carefully they chose the menu. After about one month, I told the cook that I would be having an IEP meeting the next day, so I would not be eating lunch. I knew that the salad bar was left until the end of the lunch period so I told her I would be coming in late, looking forward to a wonderful salad. She knew that I loved the homemade dinner rolls she made. The next day, she slipped one on my plate as I paid for my salad.

When I told her about the next IEP she volunteered to save me some of the hot lunch. I was very grateful. Before Christmas rolled around, she was checking on her own when the meetings were scheduled and sending a hot lunch to my room. I never once had to ask her for anything. She was a generous soul and enjoyed proving that fact to anyone who saw her dedication.

If people can respond in such a sweet manner how much more will God prove his regard?

God's love has no limit - you can't give it all away - there is always more

Prayer thoughts: *What am I holding back? Why do I not trust God enough to give?*



Wednesday, March 4, 2020

Text: Jeremiah 18:1-6

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." So, I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

Then the word of the Lord came to me: "Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done?" says the Lord, "Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. "

I got to sing at a young woman's ordination once. I did not know her well, but she had heard me sing a song about the potter's vessel and she knew that was the message she needed in this service. The most profound sentence in the song to her was, "Sometimes to start again He has to break it." She told me that she felt this was a challenge to her to be ready for drastic, breathtaking change. She spent time, years really, getting ready for God's call.

That is a scary idea.

I wonder if that is why people shy away from discussing fasting. It is a scary thing. In a very real way fasting asks us to remake our whole life. We have to reorder our eating, sleeping, interaction with family and our approach to God. We need to get ready for answers that will shake up our routine.

I had a young man ask me why his alcoholic father seemed unable to sustain any change he made in his recovery. I asked him to imagine looking in a mirror and seeing someone else's face. He said that would be terrifying to him. I told him I thought his father had that same problem. When he made changes in his life, he could not figure out who that person was and it scared him right back to the old patterns.

We are on our way to Easter. Will you take up that challenge to fast in preparation for that breathtaking revelation?

Prayer thoughts: *How ready am I for Easter?*



Thursday, March 5, 2020

Text: Matthew 6:28-33

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown in the oven, will he not much more clothe you--you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

I once knew an older woman who was a faithful church member. Abigail (not her real name) held great pride in her dress when she came to church and was critical of anyone who chose to dress less formally than she. Her daughter asked me for help one evening because she was feeling very stressed and depressed about her mother's complaints over her grandbabies being less than pristine at church. Her mother could be quite brutal when dealing out observations to her children (and others as well).

I happened to be teaching the adult Sunday School, so I chose to discuss this scripture the next week.

Abigail had little to say during our discussion. I finally asked her what she thought of this scripture. She responded, "You know, I never liked that scripture. So I just ignore it."

Well, that put me back quite a way. I had no response to that attitude. Over the years I have wondered how many of us have the same attitude. We just are not as honest as she was that morning.

I had been quite impressed with my preparation for that class. I had figured up how much time we spend eating and sleeping and preparing for our day. Cleaning and working at our jobs. Then I had worked out how much time we spend in worship and in Bible study. It was pretty pitiful how little time we spend on our spiritual health.

I never worried about God punishing Abigail. She punished herself. There was very little love between her and her children. Her daughter tried but her son cursed her name and refused to have anything to do with her. She was in church every Sunday, but she had no friends. People would say they put up with her because her husband was a real sweetheart.

Prayer thoughts: *Help me remember what I need to prioritize in my life. Help me get my needs in prospective. Help me face the scriptures that I don't like.*



Friday, March 6, 2020

Text: Isaiah 40:9

***Get you up to a high mountain,
O, Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"***

I think of this scripture every time I am tempted to be content with just baking a cake for the local senior care facility. Or when I think that someone else will notice the woman with a two-week old baby in the homeless shelter. My husband worked for about five years at a homeless shelter in Kansas City. While he worked there every baby that came in got a hand-knit sweater. I enjoyed his embarrassment when we would get honks at stop lights with people waving at him. People remembered his gift. I have always kept a 'give away' drawer in my closet. It is a heritage from my mother who taught me to knit two pair of mittens and put one in the drawer every time I knit something for myself. I have always kept hand-knit baby sweaters in the drawer for years. When I would get a phone call on Christmas Eve (every year) from the local domestic violence shelter, I would open the drawer and wrap up stuff to take over for the family who showed up on their doorstep. If I saw a toy on sale, I would buy one for my children and one for the drawer.

The one that surprised me and made me think long and hard about what was happening was a phone call I got after leaving a gift on Melissa's doorstep. She had just had her third child and I went over with a sweater. She was not home, so I left the wrapped box on her doorstep. When I answered the phone, she was weeping so hard she could hardly talk. I was a little worried, but she finally was able to tell me that she was overcome because of the gift I had left for her. I found it hard to believe her when she said that it was the first baby gift she had received. I said, "Surely your mom has given you things." She told me that her mother didn't think she should have had children and told her she would not encourage her by helping her with gifts. Melissa asked me what church I went to and started coming with me.

We all have a big mountain that we can stand on in our communities. Our voices sound out louder when we shout together.

Prayer thoughts: *Open my eyes to opportunities that open up for proclaiming God to my community. Nag me to prepare for ways to serve. Keep my mind on the Easter season and how it could be an earthquake for non-believers around me. How can I help them prepare and see the Risen Lord?*



Saturday, March 7, 2020

Text: John 15:11-16

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you.

I had a teen class ask me, "Did Jesus give any commandments?" After searching I found just this one. I tell folks who ask that my faith is encompassed in two sentences. God loves you. I love you.

The rest is just icing on the cake.

A few years ago, I became friends with a woman in the Soo. People warned me that she would soon find a reason to disrupt and end our friendship. She could not keep friends. Indeed within a few months she became angry with me and refused to talk to me on the phone about the problem. I went to her house and knocked on the door. She opened the door and told me that she wasn't my friend anymore. I told her I realized that, but I was still her friend no matter what she said or did. After a few minutes of speechlessness, she asked me into her house. We talked about our friendship over a cup of tea. She shared that she had trouble trusting people enough to form friendships that last. Her childhood was violent and left her with both physical and mental scars. She will never be an easy friend, but she is a strong friend.

The question is not who will be friends with you. The question is who needs you to be their friend.

Prayer thoughts: *How do I open myself to the love of God and his Son? How do I allow that love to flow through me to the people around me? In the coming Easter season, how will I allow God to use me as a testament of Jesus and his love?*

