

East Hartford
21 Ord 2013 8/25

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Is 58:1-14, Psa 103:1-8, Lk 13:11-17

God's Interest i.e. the Fast That I Choose

Imagine this scenario; a development project is proposed in town. Somewhere between the bright idea and the grand opening there are meetings. Hopefully there are lots and lots of meetings during which anyone, everyone, with an interest in the project participates in the conversations. When such processes are done well anyone with an interest in the project, anyone who stands to benefit and anyone who stands to lose, all the stakeholders, contribute to the conversations and participate in the decisions.

In this passage the prophet Isaiah clearly describes God's interest and disinterest in the Amazing Sacred Development Project which is nothing less than Life, all Life - human life and living in particular.

I believe God desires good life for everything that lives; slugs and mosquitos, elephants and tigers, carrots and pineapples, polar bears and humankind. We are invited into the incredible dance we call life, that we might live life exuberantly, joyfully, gratefully, abundantly.

In this passage, the prophet writes in God's voice who accuses the worshiping community by saying, basically, *"Your worship life is a phony as a 3 dollar bill. All talk - no walk. All show - no go.*

Actually it's worse than that, your hearts and minds are focused on business and profits. You just go thru the motions of worship because you want to appear respectable when you go the Rotary meeting on Thursday. Not only that, you treat people badly and work your employees too hard. Why, you won't even sit together in the same pew. Furthermore, you have the unmitigated gall to accuse me of ignoring your phony prayers.

My interest is simple. You. I want you to love others so well that

no one goes hungry. I want you to take the homeless folks home with you, see to it that everyone has a coat in cold weather, and make your families safe and loving communities that are full of love and respect for each other. That is what being faithful to me is all about. Get your act together.

If you really love me - keep the sabbath for real, not for show. At the very least, the rest will do you good."

Friends, news flash - the prophet is telling us that faith, real faith, has everything to do with right living, caring for the vulnerable, the widow and orphan, the poor and the homeless, the stranger and the outcast. The fast that God chooses is that we love our Neighbor, all of our neighbors.

The lectionary reinforces this teaching by assigning the story of the bent over woman to the same day as this lesson from Isaiah.

The key question of the gospel lesson is "*ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?*". Faith, real faith, real justice, real love for God, is all about caring for the vulnerable, those who are broken and bruised by the failure to love. Should not that woman who had suffered 18 long years be set free on the sabbath?

I want to suggest, my friends, that we, collectively and individually, are bent over. You might say, we, and Isaiah's audience, are all bent out of shape, misshapened by misplaced priorities. We cannot lift our heads to see the world around us, we are, as it were, bound by many things, and sorely need to be set free, free to love as freely as God loves us.

Clearly, the world around us, is all outta whack. You know the issues as well as I. We are warming the world faster and faster. The gap between the have too much and the don't have enough grows daily. We more or less cheerfully pay great sums of money, billions upon billions,

on ways to kill people, and complain mightily about the pennies we pay to educate or heal people or feed the hungry whose ranks grow larger day by day. In fact, during the hour we will spend together in this room, this morning an estimated 300 children will die of starvation, and hunger related causes. [The Hunger Epidemic: 300 Children Die Every Hour From Malnutrition as World's Poor Cut Back on Food By ambrosia sabrina on February 15 2012 5:17 AM [International Business Times](#)]

Our collective priorities are as twisted and bent over as those of ancient Israel when the prophet Isaiah lived, which is about as ironic as it can get since we have had both Isaiah and Jesus as our teachers. Such is our collective deformity.

I want to invite us to take a moment to look around our own hearts and lives to see where it is that we are bent over folks. Are we dealing with heavy loss: is a relationship crashing, is a child or grandchild running amok, is foreclosure on the doorstep, is there a rotten diagnosis, serious health concerns? Do fear and anxiety govern our lives and decisions? What do our calendars and our checkbooks say about our living and our spirits? What consumes us, time, energy, and soul? What imprisons, enslaves, us - or if that's all too dramatic, what holds us back in our living, what limits our loving?

Conversely, what evokes our awe, wonder, and joy? Is the sunset, or the breeze on a hot and sticky day? Is it the memory of giggling with a baby as we blow raspberries on a round and tender tummy? Is it the wonder at the miracle of birth, or simply watching kids tear around a playground at recess?

Is it witnessing the wonder of human accomplishment, and being amazed. How many of us have phones in our home or a cell phone in our pocket. These instruments are a very long way from tin cans linked by a string. How many of us are alive today because of the medical advances since the discovery of aspirin, and vaccinations?

How many of us have been delighted by an amazing book, or astounding piece of music, an incredible painting? What about plays, and movies and dance?

Friends, all this and more, much more are nothing less than gifts of God poured out upon us, blessing human life and living. Everywhere we turn, we encounter blessings of love, creativity, and kindness. We are bent over by many things, and, as we see the blessing of God, we are set free, free to love and hope and give thanks.

Therefore, I believe we, the church, have a unique path before us, a path set forth by God's Interest on our human becoming, a path made beautifully landmarked 50 years ago on Wednesday, August 28th, when the March on Washington, the one initiated by A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the one headed by Bayard Rustin, the one where Martin Luther King offered the now famous, "I Have a Dream" speech. We have a path that call us to right priorities, with right living, and right loving of neighbor, each and every neighbor.

On that day, Bayard Rustin called the people to make a great pledge, which I quote in its entirety.

Standing before the Lincoln Memorial on the 28th of August, in the centennial year of emancipation, I affirm my complete personal commitment to the struggle for jobs and freedom for Americans. To fulfill that commitment, I pledge that I will not relax until victory is won. I pledge that I will join and support all actions undertaken in good faith in accord with the time-honored Democratic tradition of non-violent protest, of peaceful assembly, and petition, and of redress through the courts and the legislative process. I pledge to carry the message of the March to my friends and neighbors, back home and arouse them to an equal commitment and equal effort. I will march and I will write letters. I will demonstrate and I will vote. I will work to make sure that my voice and those of my brothers ring clear and determine from every corner of our land. I pledge my heart and my mind and my body unequivocally and without regard to personal sacrifice, to the achievement of social peace through social justice.

Here in these words, we hear a great pledge to God's way of love. We would do well to renew and live that pledge today in answer to calls and pleas of the world around us.