

March 21, 2021

### 3. Godly Fasting

#### Isaiah 58:1-10

I distinctly remember the first Sunday my husband and I visited our last church. We were a young married couple and had just moved to my husband's hometown after living our first couple of years together in the city where I was attending university. After discussing a handful of churches with which we had connections, we decided to first check out the church in our neighborhood. I remember walking those few blocks, sun on my face, grateful for our new home and anticipating worship. The prospect of joining a Christian community right in our neighborhood was exciting to me.

But the community and the worship turned out to be even more exciting than I expected. We sat in a dark wooden pew near the back of the 100-plus-years-old church, and I just took it all in. The sanctuary was filled with diversity. I recognized some professors at the local seminary and folks who I would come to learn struggled with homelessness. Some were well dressed, polished "church ladies," and others were disheveled, even dirty. As I perused the bulletin prior to the service, I read of a weekly community lunch, paired with a food bank and clothing closet.

And then the service started. The worship music, led by a Hispanic man, was joyful and celebratory. The well-attended children's story was told by a vibrant young woman. An older black man sang heartfelt special music. The beautiful communion service was led by a retired missionary and served by a collection of folks who reflected the diversity in the pews. The folks seated behind us left at least three times for cigarette breaks. Afterwards, all these diverse folks mingled, chatted, and laughed during a coffee break.

I remember thinking, "This church *gets it!* This is what Jesus was all about!" The ministries of the church were clearly aligned with the needs of the surrounding community and reflected God's heart for the poor and the marginalized. Beyond that, those being ministered to during the week were welcomed and involved in the worship that took place on Sunday. They were not merely recipients of handouts; they were genuine, contributing members of the congregation. I had never experienced that before. This was Isaiah 58 worship—worship not wrapped up with proper or polished ceremony and ritual, but worship rooted in a community seeking to extend God's love and justice.

God's call through the prophet Isaiah is perennially applicable: for worship that is as concerned with justice as it is with sacrifice. As a pastor, I confess that through this pandemic I have given far more time and energy to perfecting virtual worship services than with the impacts of the pandemic on the marginalized in my neighborhood. Learning to stream on YouTube is far easier than inviting in the homeless poor (Isaiah 58:7), especially during a season when inviting *anyone* in is ill-advised. This pandemic Lent, as we consider again Christ's incarnate presence ministering in the middle of our broken and messy world, I am challenged by the words of Isaiah and this week's study to consider ways we might seek to bridge the gap between our worship and the needs around us. Experience tells me it's a worthy endeavor.

—Rachel Wallace

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**Rachel Wallace** loves Jesus and is seeking to follow him with her husband and two kids in rural Saskatchewan where she pastors Eigenheim Mennonite Church. Her happy place is an armchair with a strong cup of coffee and a furry friend on her lap.

*Looking for participant guide page numbers in the leader guide? The page numbers in the leader guide work for both guides.*

## Resources for this session

- **Salt & Light Video** presenter for unit 1, God's Holy People is **Elizabeth Soto Albrecht**. These teaching videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each weekly session. The videos are free and available on [MennoMedia's YouTube channel](#).
- A **Salt & Light Reproducible** is available for use with this session, found at [www.MennoMedia.org/SL](http://www.MennoMedia.org/SL).