

## All Saints Talk for 02 June 2024

**The Power of Godly Vision. Vision for Justice** - Emma King

*Readings: Isaiah 58: 5-12 Prayer and Fasting*

*Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,  
only a day for people to humble themselves?  
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed  
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?  
Is that what you call a fast,  
a day acceptable to the LORD?*

*<sup>6</sup> "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?*

*<sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—  
when you see the naked, to clothe them,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?*

*<sup>8</sup> Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness<sup>a</sup> will go before you,  
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.*

*<sup>9</sup> Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;  
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.*

*"If you do away with the yoke of oppression,  
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,  
<sup>10</sup> and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,  
then your light will rise in the darkness,  
and your night will become like the noonday.*

*<sup>11</sup> The LORD will guide you always;  
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land  
and will strengthen your frame.*

*You will be like a well-watered garden,  
like a spring whose waters never fail.*

*<sup>12</sup> Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins  
and will raise up the age-old foundations;  
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,  
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.*

Today, we turn to the powerful words of Isaiah 58:5-12

This passage challenges us to reconsider our understanding of fasting and calls us to align our lives with God's heart for justice and compassion.

I want you to think of one thing that is going on in the world today that is important and matters to you.

Something that you keep up with in the news, that you have opinions and beliefs about.

There's not a right or wrong answer here.

It could be an international event, a national concern, something local, or even a personal matter.

It could be political, economic, environmental, or social.

It could be, for example, who you'll vote for in the upcoming General Elections.

It could be the Elections that are happening in America in November.

It might be about climate change and the health of our environment

It could be about Ukraine and Russia, China and Taiwan, North and South Korea or Israel and Palestine.

It might be about our wars, the direction our country is moving, or the divisiveness in our world.

It might be about the poor, welfare recipients, the immigrants and refugees of the world.

I suspect the most difficult thing about what I am asking you to do is to pick only one thing when there are, for most of us, so many to choose from. But for today, one will do and I want you to hold this in the back of your mind...

This passage is laid out into three sections.

1. The meaningless act of fasting that had become accustom
2. Specific activities that we can be fasting for
3. The promised blessings if we do these things.

Isaiah begins by questioning the people's understanding of fasting.

They believed that outward displays of humility, such as bowing their heads and wearing sackcloth, were sufficient. I wonder how many of us have come into church on a Sunday and done just that. However, God is not impressed with these rituals that lack genuine heart transformation.

God's idea of fasting goes beyond abstaining from food. It involves active engagement in acts of justice and mercy. It goes beyond not eating or drinking our favourite foods once a year during Lent.

As it says in 6 and 7 True fasting, fasting that God has chosen for us, means breaking the chains of injustice, setting the oppressed free, sharing food with the hungry, providing shelter for the homeless, and clothing the naked. Fasting is a time of putting the needs of others before ourselves and for focusing on what it is that God is saying to us and listening to him.

When we engage in the kind of fasting God desires, we experience profound blessings as we hear in verses 8 Our light will shine like the dawn, bringing clarity and hope. We will experience healing and righteousness.

God promises to answer our calls for help if we turn away from finger pointing and thinking we are better than those in need, and instead helping those who

need it the most in our world. We must always remember that each person that is homeless, hungry, the people who so say don't fit into society, is a precious son and daughter of God, just the same as each one of us. Who are we to say that people don't fit?

I have met many people while working in Psychiatric care and with the sisters of the church in St Pauls in Bristol, who have been top lawyers and doctors, lived in big posh houses, "had it all" but yet now are living on the streets and going to food banks, or have such severe psychosis that they will never go back to that life again. We are all one step away from a life that is very different to the one we lead now.

Isaiah concludes with a vision of restoration. Those who practice true fasting will rebuild ancient ruins and raise up age-old foundations. They will be called Repairers of Broken Walls and Restorers of Streets with Dwellings.

But how can we be restorers of streets and broken walls in a world that seems so broken right now.

I want you to think back on the beginning of this talk. I asked you to think of something that is going on in the world that matters to you at the moment.

Our world politically, environmentally, culturally, emotionally is in a mess. It breaks my heart when I switch on the news...

- never in my lifetime would I think I would watch an ex-president being convicted of 34 felonies.
- Never did I ever be worried about my children going out with their friends to have innocent fun because of the threat of being caught up in knife crime.

- Never has there been an election year that is so important as the one we are in now.

We could sit at home fretting about all of these things. Or we could spring into action.

On June 20<sup>th</sup>, exactly 2 weeks before the election, in the room that will be a polling room, at the times that it will be open, we are declaring a day of Prayer and Fasting and we are all invited. You can stay for 10 minutes or for 3 hours. It might be that you cannot make it here during those times, but maybe you could pray from afar.

Today, we must examine our religious practices, what is it that we talk about week after week here in church. Are we merely going through the motions, or are we allowing these practices to transform our hearts and lives, are we allowing them to change our society and the things we care most deeply about?

True fasting is not about external displays but about an internal commitment to God's will.

Between now and then we can reflect on how we can live out these principles in our daily lives. Can we support those who are oppressed, share our resources with the needy, and provide shelter and clothing to those who lack them? Our faith must be evident in our actions.

I truly believe if we understand that God's blessings are tied to our obedience. When we align our lives with His will, we not only receive His blessings but also we can become a source of light and hope for others.

Maybe we could consider how we can contribute to the restoration of our communities.

What is God calling us to do? This could involve acts of service, advocacy for justice, and being agents of healing and hope.

Zechariah 7:9 says “This is what the Lord almighty says, “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another”

God calls us to be repairers and restorers in a broken world. He calls us to pray and to fast for the things that matter to us in the world.

Lets pray and fast on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June for our world.

- That the decisions being made this election and all over the world be for good and not for personal gain and power.
- For the chains of injustice to be broken...
- For the most oppressed in our society to be set free.
- Lets pray for enough food that no one needs to go hungry anymore, no one need sleep in a doorway and feel unsafe.
- Lets pray that each person knows the love of God.

Lets rebuild our ancient ruins here in Bath to be a place of prayer and love.

Lets be the restorers of broken hearts as well as broken walls.

Isaiah 58:5-12 calls us to a deeper, more authentic faith. It challenges us to move beyond superficial religious practices to a faith that actively engages in justice, compassion, and restoration.

As we reflect on this passage, let us commit to the kind of fasting that pleases God—a fasting that transforms our hearts and our world.