

## Ash Wednesday

“Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?”

We gather to start a new season in the church year that reminds us that Spring is coming and change is upon us. As we prayed in the collect of the day, our thoughts are to turn from the manifest glory of Jesus as Lord to the humility needed for living a new life, seeking a new and contrite heart, an attitude that seeks forgiveness in ourselves and all things that rebel against God’s law.

Lent is truly the New Year for Christians who are seeking transformation and a closer walk with Jesus. The scripture speaks of outward signs that accompany a change of life. One of those signs is fasting.

A fast is both an attitude of the heart and an outward sign. It can be a removal of a thing. Certain foods, habits or activities can be removed if they assist us in having an attitude that seeks to be transformed into a beloved daughter or son of God. Recall the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain: the lesson there is that climbing mountains in life will take us ultimately to what we should become if we keep climbing to the summit and not distracted by what we see. What the disciples saw was a glimpse of their journey’s end. If we follow Jesus, accepting our cross and its self-denial will point us to that transformation that Jesus underwent. That is the place that echoes in our hearts. I think we get glimpses of that place to inspire us and keep us climbing.

There is also the fast that is outward which takes on signs of service. In Isaiah we read:

“Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them,  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?  
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up quickly;”

The word pictures that are given in this scripture to make a good fast will challenge us in these next forty days. How are we to loose the bonds of injustice? Do we know what those injustices are? How does one undo the thongs of the yoke around someone's neck? Let the oppressed go free? Break the yokes once and for all? The sharing of bread, sheltering the homeless and clothing the naked are also vivid pictures of a fast that takes on an outward and visible sign.

It is striking how personal this can get. For us to do these signs of kindness can be easy when we are not directly involved with the destitute and estranged. Would we dare to bring them into our own homes as the scripture suggests? Have we mended the fence that we put up to hide and insulate ourselves from family members who are estranged? It seems that when we think we are doing enough to make a good fast God finds a board in our fences that are broken. He sees deeply into our psyches and souls. He keeps telling us we can do better and we were meant for more.

This Lenten season affords us opportunities for the light to break forth like the dawn. The dust of ashes we receive reminds us that we came from dust and our time is short upon earth. It is a time for renewal, healing, and going deeper into our walk with God. The light will overcome the darkness. My hope is that from here we will go out into this day and season with more than a sign of repentance on our heads but a realization that the Lord's great mercy and forgiveness merits action on our part in breaking the bondage of others. These are the treasures that are eternal and will set us free. "Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am." Amen.