

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



March 19, 2023

FAST

on keeping and breaking it

by Drew Downs

One of my favorite debates in Lent is what "counts". The season is famously 40 days. But that's only if we don't count Sundays. So, do Sundays count as Lent or not? Yes. And no. It depends on who you ask.

What we're invited into, however, is a season of *self-discipline*, which involves *the practice* of keeping fasts. The parameters around how you do it change, but the expectation that we all do it remains.

Most of us are keenly aware of the challenge of *keeping* a fast. We expect that breaking it is easy. Mostly because we link our fasts with desire and therefore struggle with not indulging our habits *as* desires.

Every fast is made to be broken. And this is why we must uncouple fasts from addiction. Fasting is a pause. An opportunity to restrain ourselves. So that we might *then* live more intentionally.

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WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Garden Clean-Up

In the 1950s, major renovations of our church building and grounds transformed our church. Both how we used it and how we looked to the world. The biggest change came in the building of what became known as the Education Wing. It housed a burgeoning Sunday School and later, a day school.

We transformed the nave and created a garden in the center of it all. We took our cues from a particular kind of traditional English church.

Despite certain attitudes, this has always been a congregation of change, and these changes in the 1950s and '60s would again change in the '70s. And '80s. And '90s...

Tending to a living garden in the middle of our campus has never been easy. But it seemed easy back then. A whole team of gardeners and a full-time sexton made caring for a garden, quite literally, *other people's business*. And today, none of those people is here.

Our garden is beautiful. But it is not *easy*. So we have asked Hank Metzger to help make it *easier* for us to keep up.

And thanks to a generous donation, Metzger's team will be cleaning it up, restoring its original character, and planting a new tree in the center. But most importantly, the garden will be *beautiful*, it will be *functional*, and it will be *sustainable*. For those who need it now and in the near future.

With love,
Drew

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FOR SUNDAY

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 19, 2023

Collect

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

John 9:1-41 (excerpt from it below)

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you

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is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

Reflection

Back at the beginning of John 7, the Judean leaders begin plotting to kill Jesus. They are out to stop his mission. And here, two chapters later, they are intent on destroying the good news of this miracle healing.

This incessant drive to destroy is the machine working behind this passage. It is also the disappointment to which Jesus responds.

This man can see! But rather than celebrate in that or give praise to God, they seek to prove someone a liar. First the young man. Then his parents. Then the young man a second time.

To call this a misunderstanding would be insulting to misunderstandings. And similarly, to give Jesus a hard time for giving *them* a hard time at the end, is similarly choosing a way of obstinance.

While I am quite fond of the skeptics in Scripture, I am as impatient as Jesus is with impudence. This is a story that should be a celebration. But these cynical "protectors" of the faith offer an inquisition. That it so resembles the way many leaders in our world choose the way of distrust, vengeance, and destruction is no coincidence. Especially when they do so in the name of God. Or to protect their faith or culture. A faith born of self-sacrifice and *being* crucified, not freeing ourselves from it.

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