

ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14

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?

Isaiah 58:6



Each year, Christians have the opportunity to begin their Ash Wednesday with one of the most penetrating texts of the Bible: Isaiah 58. For me, this chapter of Isaiah is the literary equivalent of a powerful thunderstorm.

In this chapter, God probes the depth and authenticity of a people and a nation that consider themselves faithful and yet hardly care for the vulnerable in their midst. Such religious hypocrisy stinks to high heaven. From there, God bellows, “Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and you oppress all your workers” (Isaiah 58:3b).

Beginning the season of Lent with Isaiah 58 prepares us for wrestling with probing questions of depth and authenticity over the next forty days. We will explore what it means to be a faithful person in our day while knowing that the fast and sacrifice that God ultimately desires is to “loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke” (Isaiah 58:6).

Today’s readings

Psalm 103 or 103:8–14 | Joel 2:1–2,12–17 or
Isaiah 58:1–12 | 2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10
Matthew 6:1–6,16–21

How might the stirring message of Isaiah 58 serve as an invitation to a new way of experiencing the season of Lent?