

## *What Does Resistance Look Like?*

I'm going to ask you to do a couple of things and I hope you will indulge me for a bit. 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, and that maybe you even post about in social media, or talk about with those who are like minded.

There's not a right or wrong answer here. I'm not concerned with what the topic is or what you believe about it. 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 about the Republican majority in the congress. It might be about climate change and the health of our environment, the Coronavirus, gun violence, racism, discrimination or violence against women, the violence between Israel and Palestine. It might be about police brutality, the direction our country is moving, or the polarization and divisiveness in our world.

It might be about economic policies or health care and insurance. It might be about the poor, welfare recipients, the immigrants and refugees of the world. It might be about a decision you need to make, a relationship or something concerning your marriage, family or work.

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.

So, you got it? You know what it is? Now let me ask you this. Does your worship on Sunday affect how you see and deal with whatever it is you chose? If so, how? If not, why not?

In what ways do the Sunday prayers, the scripture, communion, inform and guide your thinking? Are they the lens through which you see the world and others, hear the news, and make decisions? Do you carry them with you through the rest of the week or do you leave them at the door as you leave this sanctuary?

What I'm really asking is whether Jesus, the gospel, the law and the prophets, have anything to do with our politics, economics, social values, and personal decisions

When I look at what's happening in the world today, what we're doing to each other, the things we're saying about those who disagree with us, the way we claim God is on our side – I wonder if we are salt that has lost its favor and light that is hidden under a bushel basket.

A friend of mine often reminds me that the gospel – the good news of Jesus – is sometimes bad news before it is good news. It asks us to face up to ourselves before we face down another. And facing up to ourselves is rarely fun or easy – whether you're the preacher or the listener.

That's the challenge Isaiah holds before us this morning.

God tells Isaiah, "Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion."

Their rebellion is that they are fasting – doing the religious thing – for their own interest and at the same time oppressing others. They are fasting – doing the religious thing – but it hasn't

changed their lives. They still quarrel, fight and strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting, God says will not let their voice be heard on high. That is not the fast God chooses.

Sometimes I can't help but wonder if that is also my rebellion. Do my actions align with and reflect what I claim to believe about God? Is there more congruity or more contradiction in my life? Is the religious thing I am doing for the benefit and welfare of others? Or is it mostly for me so that I can go on with business as usual?

We can gather here each Sunday and say our prayers, nod in agreement with the scriptures and sing our praises to God but if those things do not govern and guide our actions in this world, if they do not align our interests and concerns with God's, if they are merely self serving words to make us feel better about ourselves, then they fall deaf on God's dears. God isn't listening.

Maybe we should spend less time speaking the truth about God and more time doing the truth of God. What would that look like in your life? What would that mean for the things that are important and matter to you? How might that change your decisions, priorities, or opinions.

Speaking through Isaiah, God says that means untying and freeing another from the bonds of injustice. It means letting the oppressed go free. It means sharing our bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into our house. It means giving clothes to the naked. It means stop pointing the finger and speaking evil of others. It means satisfying the needs of the afflicted.

Injustice, oppression, hunger, homelessness, poverty, nakedness, blame and slander are God's concerns, things that are important and matter to God. And they are not only physical conditions. They can also be emotional and spiritual. We can hunger for a meal and we can hunger for love. We can be homeless on the streets and we can be homeless within ourselves. Nakedness might mean we have no clothes or that we have no hope.

I wish doing the truth were as easy as writing a check, donating some food or clothes, or building a homeless shelter. But I don't think it is. I am not against those things and I hope we will always respond with compassion and generosity. Those things need to be done. But we need to be careful they don't become just another day of fasting in which nothing changes.

We are in the beginning of Black History Month and the theme this year is Resistance. And I think that is what Isaiah is talking about. Resisting going through the motions in church and thinking that is all you need to do. Resisting the easy road and standing up for change.

This past spring, Gary and I went on a civil rights tour down south where we learned so much more than we knew before. Today, as part of Black History month, I want to talk to you about someone I learned about. His name was Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth and he was the pastor of Bethel Baptist Church from 1953 – 1961. His tenure as the pastor was marked by demonstrations, bombings and passionate sermons critical of segregation laws. His activism earned him a house bombing, frequent beatings, arrest, and threats to this family.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr called him “one of the nation’s most courageous freedom fighters” even though King and Shuttlesworth clashed on the tactics of how their resistance would happen.

The church he served as bombed three times, Dec. 25, 1956, June 29, 1958 and Dec. 14, 1962.

When a dynamite blast blew off the roof of his parsonage, he walked right out unharmed, and told a policeman, “Tell your Kan brothers that if God could save me through this, they’ll have to come up with something better, so the fight’s on.” That’s resistance, my friends. The insert in the bulletin shows you a photo of Rev. Shuttlesworth, the parsonage that was destroyed and the three markers at the present church where the bombs went off.

There are two banners around the church. One says, “Bethel was the movement and the movement was the church”, and the other says “The church was 100% behind him. They knew he was doing the right thing.

I think that is what God is saying through Isaiah. This is the fast I choose; releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke, setting free the mistreated, and breaking every yoke?

Let me share with you a more modern illustration of resistance for you. It happened right here in this sanctuary. It was when Ded and Flora were staying with us. ICE was beginning to get more aggressive and starting to go into hospitals and I was afraid they would come into our church to arrest Ded.

So one morning I told Drew, who watches our door off the parking lot, “If ICE comes to the door, whatever is happening in the service, I want you to interrupt me so I can handle it.” And sure enough in the middle of my sermon I hear a “Rev. Jill” over my shoulder. It was Drew saying “ICE is here.” Several of you were here and remember this.

I looked out at all of you and said, “Start praying.” And I walked out to the lobby. What I encountered there was a Detroit Police Officer looking for someone who had broken in to a business. So I said, You’re not ICE? He responded “no”. So I waved my hand at him and walked back into the sanctuary.

But what I found blew me away and I will never forget it. Everyone in worship that day had surrounded Ded so that ICE could not get to him. That is resistance and that is what God is talking about to us this morning. It’s not about coming to church to put in your time and walk out with nothing changed.

Everything we hear today has everything to do with our politics, economics, social values and personal decisions.

Archbishop Helder Camara of Brazil said, “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist.”

I hear the words of Archbishop Camara, the words of Isaiah, the words of Jesus and I have to ask myself not only how am I responding to those conditions but, also, why those conditions

exist and in what ways are my lifestyle, decisions, opinions and actions enabling and perpetuating those conditions in the life of another.

It's the kind of thing that keeps me awake at night. Maybe it does you too. And maybe it should. Maybe it should keep us all awake at night.

Let me close with the Word on the Street Translation of our scripture for today.

This is the type of fasting I've asked for: getting the heavy duty cutters on the chains of injustice. Chain sawing through the ropes holding down the oppressed. Isn't religion about spreading the food out to include the starving? Isn't it about putting a roof over the heads of refugees? About putting clothes on the naked? About not turning a blind eye on your own family? You do this and you'll be like the sun after a long dark night. It'll do you good too! Your catchphrase will be "just doing the right thing." May it be so. Amen.