

## Monday, March 24th--Isaiah 55:1-7

55 "Come, all you who are thirsty,

come to the waters;

and you who have no money,

come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk

without money and without cost.

2 Why spend money on what is not bread,

and your labor on what does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,

and you will delight in the richest of fare.

3 Give ear and come to me;

listen, that you may live.

I will make an everlasting covenant with you,

my faithful love promised to David.

4 See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,

a ruler and commander of the peoples.

5 Surely you will summon nations you know not,

and nations you do not know will come running to you,

because of the LORD your God,

the Holy One of Israel,

for he has endowed you with splendor."

6 Seek the LORD while he may be found;

call on him while he is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake their ways

and the unrighteous their thoughts.

Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them,

and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

## Points of Interest:

### **Image of the Day**--*Free food*

God is throwing a fantastic party, and everyone is invited. Come one, come all. No invite list, tickets, or cover charge. No need even to bother bringing anything; God has more than enough for everyone. And we're not talking about a bag of potato chips and some uninspiring punch, either. It's a carefully planned menu, the most delicious foods paired with the most satisfying drinks. It's almost too good to be true.

The alternative to this amazing offer is a really bad one: pay a high price for stuff that's practically inedible. It's a set of choices we don't often see: the best stuff for free, or the worst at the highest prices. Choice A: a completely free meal at the city's top restaurant. Choice B: paying extortionate prices for whatever's been under the gas station convenience store heat lamp all day. Who would choose B?

### **Bible Figure of the Day**--*David*

David and his Mighty Men are like a precursor to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. David is the hero-king of the Israelites, and his reign is looked back on as a golden age. He was a brave warrior, a (mostly) wise ruler, and--as a special bonus--a famous songwriter and musician. He ruled in the days just before the civil war which broke the country up into Israel and Judah. He founded Jerusalem as the capital, and prepared the way for his son Solomon to build the temple there. Its strong association with David goes a long way toward explaining just how beloved Jerusalem is among the people of Israel; another nickname for Jerusalem is the City of David.

As with Abraham, Moses, and Noah, God formed one of those famous covenants with David. God's promise to David essentially boils down to, 'I'll make sure a descendant of yours is always on the throne.' This covenant, like the ones with Abraham and Moses, was seemingly put into jeopardy by the Babylonian conquest. God is renewing, and maybe even expanding that covenant here.

I'm not quite sure with whom God is making this Davidic covenant. It's been a while since the focus has been on him, but the most logical recipient would be the Servant, to whom God says in 53:12, 'I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong.' For his work in bearing the sins of many, the Servant is added to the Pantheon with David. Once again, in this regard, there's a strong identification of Jesus with the Servant; the gospels tell us that Jesus is a descendant of David.

If this Davidic covenant isn't being offered to the Servant, my next best guess would be that God has a far broader expansion in mind: this David offer is available to anyone who says, 'Yes,' to the party. Anyone who attends the party not only has a good time, but gets a throne as a party favor, and is a blood brother with God forever.

### **Advice of the Day**--*Don't hesitate*

One time, through incredible circumstances, my favorite band left a backstage pass for me at their concert. Even more unbelievably, they invited me up on stage to sing along on the chorus of my favorite song. The only problem is, foolishly deciding I was too busy, I hadn't gone to the concert.

God warns us not to make the same mistake with this party: 'Call on me when I'm near.' Speak up now. Be bold. God is here, the party is great, and you have a personal invitation. You'll regret later if you miss this chance.

### **Promise of the Day--*Amnesty***

All old debts are settled, and the past is forgotten. This party is a chance to start fresh. Even if you haven't been friends with God before, even if you've been enemies, you're welcome at the party. Anyone who comes is now a friend.

### **Taking it Home:**

*For our city:* The lavish abundance of God's party offer is just too compelling. Everyone gets invited? And fed? And has all their needs met? Ask God to help make our city more like this. Ask God to provide for those today who are struggling financially. Ask God to welcome those who are normally excluded. Ask God for our city to know the ways God provides.

## **Tuesday, March 25th--Isaiah 55:8-13**

**8** "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,"

declares the LORD.

**9** "As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

**10** As the rain and the snow  
come down from heaven,  
and do not return to it  
without watering the earth  
and making it bud and flourish,  
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

**11** so is my word that goes out from my mouth:  
It will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

**12** You will go out in joy  
and be led forth in peace;

the mountains and hills

will burst into song before you,

and all the trees of the field

will clap their hands.

**13** Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper,

and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.

This will be for the LORD's renown,

for an everlasting sign,

that will endure forever."

## Points of Interest:

### **Theology of the Day**--*God's word*

God starts this passage with a declaration: God's thoughts, ways of doing things, and words are different from ours. I should think so. It seems, though, that what God has in mind is different from what I might expect. I would think that God would be smarter than me, and more of an upstanding person than me; basically, I expect God's thoughts, ways of doing things, and words to be overall better than mine. That's all certainly true. But the difference God has in mind is this: God's words are more effective.

My words and--no offense--yours are just so much hot air in and of themselves. Unless they're backed up by actions, my words come out of my mouth, linger around a little, and then dissipate. And sometimes, even when I have the best intentions, I simply lack the power to back up my words. Whether by my fault or not, there can be an alarmingly wide gap between what I say and what happens.

Not so with God. God's words always accomplish something. There's no difference between the word and the deed. We see that in the Bible's story of creation. God speaks the word, and the world comes into being: 'God said, "Let there be light," and there was light' (Genesis 1:3). It's the same with everything God says.

### **Image of the Day**--*Clapping trees*

Once again, nature notices and celebrates what God is doing. In 49:13, God coaxes the mountains into song. Here, they more spontaneously burst out in song again, and the trees join them with a round of applause. Are the hills and trees merely the audience for the great things God is doing for people, or are they somehow beneficiaries as well?

### **Sign of the Day**--*Thornless thornbushes*

When God made a covenant with Noah, promising that the world would never be flooded again,

God gave a sign. Whenever it rained, Noah was to look for the rainbow as the reminder of God's commitment that the rain would end. Here God gives a sign of this new Davidic covenant from yesterday's passage: the disappearance of weeds. The lowly, useless, entangling, and irritating thornbushes will become pleasant, aromatic, always bright evergreens.

## Taking it Home:

*For our church:* Even though, in the end, I'm probably still going to tend to think highly of my thoughts and opinions, I really am convinced that God's are better, and would love to see God's words and ways be what defines our church. Spend some time today listening and praying for God's words about our church. What does God say that God loves about our church? What is God doing in our our church now? Want to see happen in our church in the future?

## Wednesday, March 26th--Isaiah 56:1-8

**56** This is what the LORD says:

"Maintain justice  
and do what is right,  
for my salvation is close at hand  
and my righteousness will soon be revealed.

**2** Blessed is the one who does this—

the person who holds it fast,  
who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it,  
and keeps their hands from doing any evil."

**3** Let no foreigner who is bound to the LORD say,

"The LORD will surely exclude me from his people."  
And let no eunuch complain,  
"I am only a dry tree."

**4** For this is what the LORD says:

"To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,  
who choose what pleases me  
and hold fast to my covenant—

**5** to them I will give within my temple and its walls  
a memorial and a name  
better than sons and daughters;

I will give them an everlasting name  
that will endure forever.

**6** And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD  
to minister to him,  
to love the name of the LORD,  
and to be his servants,  
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it  
and who hold fast to my covenant—

**7** these I will bring to my holy mountain  
and give them joy in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house will be called  
a house of prayer for all nations.”

**8** The Sovereign LORD declares—  
he who gathers the exiles of Israel:  
“I will gather still others to them  
besides those already gathered.”

## Points of Interest:

### **Encouragement of the Day**--*Stick to the path*

Over the course of our reading, Isaiah has piled on image after image to describe the wonderful new life God is preparing. It's a bustling, big, wonderful family. It's a peaceful, jewel-bedecked city. It's good pastureland. It's the best party ever.

God has also built a broad, clear, level path straight to that new life. There are plenty of good rest stops, and even crowds of hills and mountains to cheer you on as you go. All you need to do is follow the path, and you're sure to get there.

That's what God encourages us to do here: 'Maintain justice.' You may recall from 51:5 that the Hebrew word for *justice* means something like 'straight.' Just stay on the path, don't make any turns or wander off, and everything will be just fine.

### **Theological Term of the Day**--*Sabbath*

*Sabbath* means 'stop.' One of the 10 Commandments (which are the main substance of God's covenant with Moses and the Israelites), is to take one sabbath, or 'stop,' day a week. It's a day to

stop all of the usual busyness and rest. The sabbath was designed after God's own pattern. In Genesis 2:2, after six days of work creating the world, God took a break on the seventh. God thought it worked out so well that it was worth passing on to others. Throughout their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, God continued to model taking a sabbath for Moses and the Israelites. Six days a week, God fed the Israelites; the seventh day, they ate leftovers.

Despite its seemingly obvious appeal and God's recommendation, the sabbath apparently had a hard time catching on. In Moses' laws, he had to threaten death as the punishment for failure to sabbath to get people to do it.

I don't know exactly why God focuses on the sabbath here as the key road sign for the right path to the good life. Maybe God is making the point that this great life being promised isn't and can't be the result of hard work; it's a gift from God.

### **Ancient Near Eastern People Group of the Day--Eunuchs**

Have you heard the phrase, 'Married to your work'? Ancient Near Eastern governments took it to a whole different level. They commonly employed castrated males as government administrators and court officials. They figured that, without a wife or family to provide for, these eunuchs would be more devoted to work and less susceptible to corruption. The practice was so prevalent that the two sets were highly overlapping: to be a government official almost always meant to be castrated, and to be castrated meant you were probably a court official. The word *eunuch* came to be used equally for both things.

### **Big Idea of the Day--Handsome is as handsome does**

The sabbath was pretty much an Israelite thing. To Isaiah's original audience of Jerusalem citizens, a foreigner and even more particularly a foreign eunuch wouldn't seem like a very likely sabbath-keeper. He wouldn't look the part, or be in the right clubs. His parents wouldn't have been sabbath-keepers. He wouldn't speak the language.

None of that matters to God. As far as God is concerned, from here on out, there are no preconditions. It doesn't matter what you look like, or where you come from, how much you know about the sabbath, or whether you've kept it previously. If you keep the sabbath, you're a sabbath-keeper; it's as simple as that.

### **Theme of the Day--A house of prayer for all nations**

In 52:11, I proposed the wild theory that the Babylonian captors become rescued exiles returning to Jerusalem, and maybe even members of the Levite tribe, the special temple servants. I may or may not have been on to something there, but it's definitely happening here for the foreigner and the eunuch. As Isaiah is writing, most of the temple would be completely prohibited to someone like this foreigner and his eunuch friend, the eunuch by Moses' law (Deuteronomy 23:1) and the foreigner by custom. But God imagines a time when they'll be making themselves at home there.

That the temple would be a place where non-Israelites could meet God was part of the original plan; Solomon mentions them in his prayer dedicating it (2 Chronicles 6:32-33). But that idea quickly fell off the screen for the citizens of Jerusalem; and, truth be told, the foreigners didn't seem that interested either. God, however, has not forgotten. As the God of all the earth, God

wants all the earth welcome in, and participating in, what goes on in God's house.

## **God's Declaration of the Day--I'm just getting started**

If the eunuch and the foreigner make people uncomfortable by their presence in the temple, people better get used to it. There are many more where they came from. God likes this whole gathering thing, and is going to keep on doing it.

## **Taking it Home:**

*For your six:* God is clearly ready to welcome everyone and anyone, even those who might be a surprising a choice. Ask God for your six to feel incredibly welcomed by God and by those who follow God. If any of your six have especially felt like they wouldn't or don't belong with God or others, ask God to show them clear examples of their acceptance.

## **Thursday, March 27th--Isaiah 56:9-57:2**

**9** Come, all you beasts of the field,  
come and devour, all you beasts of the forest!

**10** Israel's watchmen are blind,  
they all lack knowledge;

they are all mute dogs,  
they cannot bark;

they lie around and dream,  
they love to sleep.

**11** They are dogs with mighty appetites;  
they never have enough.

They are shepherds who lack understanding;  
they all turn to their own way,  
they seek their own gain.

**12** "Come," each one cries, "let me get wine!  
Let us drink our fill of beer!  
And tomorrow will be like today,  
or even far better."

**57** The righteous perish,  
and no one takes it to heart;  
the devout are taken away,

and no one understands  
that the righteous are taken away  
to be spared from evil.

**2** Those who walk uprightly  
enter into peace;  
they find rest as they lie in death.

## Points of Interest:

### **Dark Turn of the Day--***Wild beasts attack*

What a jarring and unwelcome change of scene from yesterday to today! Last we knew, a new Zion, committed to universal and perpetual peace was open for business, the highways were clear and safe, and people were streaming in from unexpected corners of the world. Now, it's all snapping fangs and slashing claws. Ferocious beasts have gotten in amongst the caravan, and it's terrible chaos. What in the world has happened?

### **Image of the Day--***The drunken shepherd*

Actually it's more of a composite image. We have a watchman who can't see, a guard dog who can't bark, and a shepherd no sharper than their sheep. All of them have had too much wine from God's open bar in 55:1. They're so plastered that they think everything is fantastic, but in actuality they're completely falling down on their jobs. It puts them and everyone they're supposed to be guarding in peril. They're so incapacitated that God sarcastically says it's like they've posted 'Free Sheep' and 'Seeks Wild Animal Attacks' signs.

I think they've fundamentally misunderstood the generosity of God's party. They take the abundance as an invitation to overindulge, but the real point of it is that there's plenty for everyone. They're greedily taking too much themselves, and that stops them from being able to help others get to the party.

### **Chilling Dose of Reality of the Day--***Better off dead*

The best among them seem to be snatched up first, and people can't understand the unfairness of it. God corrects them: it's a mercy. Things have suddenly reached such a dystopian level that you're better off dying early, before things get really awful.

## Taking it Home:

*For you:* What is something you are leading? A project at work? Your family's activities? An organization. Ask God to make you a leader who has wisdom to make good decisions, compassion for the people, and vision for the project at hand. Ask God to protect you from the ways that Israel's leaders had gone astray. Ask God for his help in any of the small things or big things you are leading.

## Friday, March 28th--Isaiah 57:3-13

**3** “But you—come here, you children of a sorceress,  
you offspring of adulterers and prostitutes!

**4** Who are you mocking?

At whom do you sneer  
and stick out your tongue?

Are you not a brood of rebels,  
the offspring of liars?

**5** You burn with lust among the oaks  
and under every spreading tree;

you sacrifice your children in the ravines  
and under the overhanging crags.

**6** The idols among the smooth stones of the ravines are your portion;  
indeed, they are your lot.

Yes, to them you have poured out drink offerings  
and offered grain offerings.

In view of all this, should I relent?

**7** You have made your bed on a high and lofty hill;  
there you went up to offer your sacrifices.

**8** Behind your doors and your doorposts  
you have put your pagan symbols.

Forsaking me, you uncovered your bed,  
you climbed into it and opened it wide;  
you made a pact with those whose beds you love,  
and you looked with lust on their naked bodies.

**9** You went to Molek with olive oil  
and increased your perfumes.

You sent your ambassadors far away;  
you descended to the very realm of the dead!

**10** You wearied yourself by such going about,

but you would not say, 'It is hopeless.'

You found renewal of your strength,  
and so you did not faint.

**11** "Whom have you so dreaded and feared

that you have not been true to me,  
and have neither remembered me  
nor taken this to heart?

Is it not because I have long been silent  
that you do not fear me?

**12** I will expose your righteousness and your works,  
and they will not benefit you.

**13** When you cry out for help,  
let your collection of idols save you!

The wind will carry all of them off,  
a mere breath will blow them away.

But whoever takes refuge in me  
will inherit the land  
and possess my holy mountain."

## Points of Interest:

### **Bad Choice of the Day--Mockery**

The Sorcerer family sees the tragedy of the caravan and thinks it's hilarious. They're laughing, and joking, and mocking: 'How do you like God's highway, now?' they ask. 'Oh no, you don't,' God responds. We'll see what happens when trouble turns their way.

### **Theological Term of the Day--Idolatry**

Today's passage is the first we've seen of idols, but it's actually a big theme in Isaiah. God sees himself in something of a contest with idols for people's attention, and can't believe he has to stoop so low. God is alive, powerful, and constantly offering to help. But whenever people get into trouble they make their own little gods out of gold, silver, and wood and cry out to them to be saved instead.

The passage in 50:11--when God says, 'You're all lighters of fire,' because they light torches instead of trusting God to lead in the dark--is probably an oblique reference to making idols. Isaiah

is calling back to a passage from chapter 44 about a foolish carpenter:

Half of the wood he burns in the fire;  
 over it he prepares his meal,  
 he roast his meal and eats his fill.  
 He also warms himself and says,  
 'Ah, I am warm; I see the fire.'  
 From the rest he makes a god, his idol,  
 he bows down to it and worships.  
 He prays to it and says,  
 'Save me! You are my god!' (44:16-17)

Most of the behavior described in this passage--sex in oak groves, sacrificing children, altars on hilltops, signs on doorposts--are typical elements of idol worship in surrounding nations, and apparently among nervous Israelites as well.

**Image of the Day**--*Ambassador to the dead*

Desperate for alliances, they'll fall into bed with anyone. They send ambassadors far and wide with an open offer of partnership. Leaving no stone unturned, they even send someone to the cemetery to ask the buried bodies, 'Can you help?'

They do all of this while God is standing there, with outstretched hand, offering to be their blood brother.

**Character Trait of the Day**--*False confidence*

All of this making and worshipping of idols, and this searching high and low for allies, is exhausting. Having done all of that hard work, the Sorcerers reassure themselves that they must be safe. But all of that effort only adds up to the illusion of help. They're relying on an idol with ears that don't hear and with arms that can't lift a thing.

**Taking it Home:**

*For you:.* Unless I'm thinking about *American Idol*, the word *idol* just sounds primitive to me. I mean, c'mon, I'm not now nor have I ever been looking to sacrifice a child with the hopes that it would keep me safe or guarantee me the fame I've been looking for. Any yet, I'm pretty sure I have a thing or two that would qualify an idol--even if it's not a figurine of gold or wood. Something that's helped me discover some of my idols has been to pay attention to what my mind wanders to. Here's a fun little exercise: find a quiet place to sit in silence. For a minute or two (really as long as you can) just sit there with God. Don't try to come up with words or thoughts to pray, but just try to think about God. Once you notice your mind wandering off, turn your attention back to God. When you're finished, talk to God about the thoughts that snuck--or stampeded--their way into your mind. What were they about? Ask God to show you if there are any idols somehow wrapped up in the things your mind wandered to.

## Saturday, March 29th--Isaiah 57:14-21

14 And it will be said:

“Build up, build up, prepare the road!

Remove the obstacles out of the way of my people.”

15 For this is what the high and exalted One says—

he who lives forever, whose name is holy:

“I live in a high and holy place,

but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit,

to revive the spirit of the lowly

and to revive the heart of the contrite.

16 I will not accuse them forever,

nor will I always be angry,

for then they would faint away because of me—

the very people I have created.

17 I was enraged by their sinful greed;

I punished them, and hid my face in anger,

yet they kept on in their willful ways.

18 I have seen their ways, but I will heal them;

I will guide them and restore comfort to Israel’s mourners,

19 creating praise on their lips.

Peace, peace, to those far and near,”

says the LORD. “And I will heal them.”

20 But the wicked are like the tossing sea,

which cannot rest,

whose waves cast up mire and mud.

21 “There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.”

### Points of Interest:

#### **Character Trait of the Day--*Humility***

God is rich, famous, and powerful, and lives in a beautiful house in a great neighborhood. But if you get to know him, you’ll be surprised just how down-to-earth God is. In yesterday’s passage, God

made no secret of his lack of affection for the proud and mocking Sorcerer family. The humble are more God's type. God can't get enough of people who don't think too highly of themselves and whose ears and eyes are open to ways they might have failed someone else. God would do anything for people like that.

Thankfully, the humble are not a very exclusive club. Practically anyone can join. Even the mockers of yesterday's passage and the self-satisfied from the day before are welcome to apply for a transfer of membership.

### **Theology of the Day--***The God who makes people*

Yesterday we took a look at people who try to make gods. Today we see the God who makes people. For the people involved, being made by God is a far better deal than making your own gods. Isaiah 46:1-2 tells the blackly comic story of the Babylonians fleeing to escape a pursuing Persian army. Looking back over their shoulders, they see that their idols, not having legs that can run, aren't keeping up. The Babylonians go back for their gods, but the extra weight of the idols slows them down so much that the Persians catch them, and the Babylonians and idols alike are taken off as prisoners. Their idols couldn't save them. Even worse, their idols couldn't save themselves. Even worse again, their idols get them caught. But what could they do? Once you make a god, you can't just abandon it.

God feels exactly the same about the people God makes. Like it or not, they're God's creation. God can't simply leave them to their own devices. God has a responsibility to help. God feels it even for the people who are basically stubborn jerks--and thank goodness for that.

### **Image of the Day--***The tossing sea*

God says, 'Peace, peace.' But the peace simply bounces off the wicked. They're like a raging ocean. If a pot of water, or even a swimming pool is unsettled, you can calm it down; but the sea is too big to notice whatever paltry attempts at calming we might employ. The heart of the wicked is the same. They're in such turmoil that even God's efforts at calming them have no effect.

### **Taking it Home:**

*For you:* While I'm glad anyone can join in on Club Humble, I'm afraid I'm predisposed to leave myself out; I think too highly of myself, all too often and all too easily. During your day today, make it your goal to recognize the work and the worth of as many people around you as possible, and specifically to recognize what you have learned or gained from knowing them. Spend some time right now thanking God for everything God has given you.

## **Sunday, March 30th--Isaiah 58:1-7**

**58** "Shout it aloud, do not hold back.

Raise your voice like a trumpet.

Declare to my people their rebellion

and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.

**2** For day after day they seek me out;

they seem eager to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that does what is right

and has not forsaken the commands of its God.

They ask me for just decisions

and seem eager for God to come near them.

**3** ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say,

‘and you have not seen it?’

Why have we humbled ourselves,

and you have not noticed?’

“Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please

and exploit all your workers.

**4** Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,

and in striking each other with wicked fists.

You cannot fast as you do today

and expect your voice to be heard on high.

**5** 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?

**6** “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?

**7** 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?

## Points of Interest:

### **The Image of the Day**--*The jury returns a verdict*

Today's passage is a courtroom scene. Jacob--I don't know if this is some subset of the original 12 tribes, or it's Isaiah's new Jacob with people from everyone adopted in--is suing God. They feel that God has not properly compensated them for their religious practices, and they're suing for back wages. They're very confident that they're going to win the case.

The jury comes back from its deliberation with a surprise verdict. It's Jacob who is guilty. All along, when it's looked like they've been working (maybe even to them), they've actually been embezzling from God, and undermining God's business.

### **Spiritual Practice of the Day**--*Fasting*

Depriving oneself of food for spiritual purposes is a longstanding and widespread practice. At least in the Bible, it's never clearly explained why we do this. It may symbolize grieving. Like someone who has just lost a loved one and is simply too focused on their loss to remember to eat, we're too sad at the state of the world or at the state of our relationship with God to nourish ourselves properly. It may be a symbol of spiritual hunger. We're so hungry for God that we can't be bothered by something so unimportant as food. Maybe it symbolizes both.

Moses commanded that people fast one day a year. Apparently, Jacob is fasting far more frequently than that, but they feel like God hasn't noticed all of this overtime they've been putting in. On the contrary, God has indeed noticed. God has noticed how they're more irritable with people in service positions, and more demanding. God has noticed how easily they get into fights with one another. God has noticed what a big show they put on so that everyone knows the sacrifice they're making. None of this impresses God. Of the very many commandments found in Moses' laws, the two biggest are, 'Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength' (Deuteronomy 6:5) and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18). The two go hand-in-hand. You can't draw closer to God at the expense of your neighbor. And that's what Jacob is trying to do. In essence, they're stealing something from their neighbors, wrapping it up as a gift to God, and then wondering why God isn't happy.

God has a counter-suggestion from them. Why don't they forget fasting from food, and instead take some time off from mistreating others? That's something that would actually bring them closer to God.

## Taking it home

*For our city:* Ask God to give each person in our city more love for their neighbor and that we would be a city that deeply cares about the well being of others. Ask God particularly for strong relationships in our city that would transcend lines of race, class, and culture.