

“Too Fast to Fast”
 Deut. 26:1-11; Luke 4:1-13
 Rev. David Hutchinson
 Sunday, March 10, 2019

In our world - - lots of things - - move very quickly.

Jet planes - - news stories - - the latest fashions - - are just some examples.

Have you ever compared a movie from the 1940s - - to a movie made today?

Do you know what I mean? / It's a different pace.

And do you think that if you could have shown a movie from TODAY - - to an audience in the 40's - - people might have gotten motion sickness?!

It's been years since AIRPLANES broke the SOUND barrier.

And I understand that according to the theory of relativity - - if you could go as fast as the speed of LIGHT - - you might actually get YOUNGER!

There was a young lady named BRIGHT

Whose SPEED - - was FASTER than LIGHT

She went out one day

In a relative way

And returned - the PREVIOUS night!

The fairly common assumption of our culture seems to be that - - fast is GOOD.

Fast cars - - fast service - - fast, fast, fast.

So where are WE in this fast paced world?

Are we caught up in it - - or afraid of it huddling behind our locked doors?

I was thinking about all this - - because we're beginning the SEASON of LENT.

Lent is a time of contemplation and preparation for Easter - - that seems to run COUNTER to all this faced paced stuff. / Praying more - - giving something up - - all seems to be more about SLOWING down.

And one thing - - people sometimes DO during Lent - - is to “FAST”.

“Fast” can mean something other than “quick”.

A FAST is a time when you give up - - or LIMIT - - your FOOD intake.

In our scripture reading for this morning - - Luke’s gospel tells us - - that Jesus - - FASTED for 40 days in the wilderness. / He went without. / He slowed down.

Did you know that the WORD “to fast” - - meaning go without food - - comes from a word that means “to hold fast” - - or to “keep” - - “to guard”.

Do you see - - the REVERSAL?

A word meaning “to move quickly” - - ALSO means - - “to hold fast” - - that is to “stay firmly fixed” - - steadfast - - and strong.

In fact STAY - - is the earlier meaning.

It only came to mean QUICK - - when it was combined with words like “run”.

As in - - to run STRONGLY

Or - - - to run - - FAST.

Isn’t that amazing!

A word that used to mean STAY - - as in to FASTEN - - came to mean GO!

It’s incredible!

SO then - - a ritual called “fasting” - - or going without food - - in order to STAND FIRM in one’s religious conviction - - has - - gone by the wayside.

Who fasts anymore?

Who wants to SLOW down - - enough - - to go without food for three days?

Who wants to sacrifice anything - - for religious conviction?

As long as you drink “light beer” - - you can drink as much as you want - - and not get fat and keep on partying - - and living as fast as you can! / Right??

Well - - maybe for a while.

But living - - too fast to fast - - catches up with people too.

Our scripture reading for today - - holds up another way.

Jesus fasted.

In the 4th chapter, Luke’s gospel reports that Jesus went into the wilderness - - and fasted.

He shows us another way to be FAST - - to hold fast to faithfulness - - to be STRONG in commitment and dedication. / From a time when “FAST” meant something else:

TO be steady - - to be FASTENED - - to hold FAST.

Why - - did Jesus fast?

Slowing down during Lent - - is NOT to SLACK off.

It is - - to summon spiritual strength.

Jesus - - wrestled - - with DEAMONS in the wilderness.

Slowing down during Lent - - might mean - - getting in touch with God.

Or preparing yourself - - to deal with something in your life.

Or finding strength - - to help someone else.

Where do you need to - - hold fast - - in your life?

Luke’s gospel reading - - helps us think about these things.

In the OTHER reading - - from the Old Testament - - in the book of Deuteronomy - - the Israelites throw a FEAST. / But their FEASTING - - is actually - - for SIMILAR reasons - - as Jesus FASTING.

After they had lived for a little while in their new HOME - - they tilled the ground - - and they brought in the first HARVEST. / And the FIRST thing they did - - was to take some of it and offer it back to God - - as an act of faith. / The so called - - “first fruits” of the harvest are offered to God - - and eventually - - this leads to a FEAST.

Their feast - - is a celebration of all that God has done for them.

In our culture - - the Thanksgiving meal - - is similar.

Or if you are a follower of Jesus - - Easter - - can be that way too.

The Old Testament is about a FEAST - - rather than a FAST.

But whether it's FEASTING or FASTING - - the ORIGINS of both practices are found in the desire to HOLD FAST - - to God. / Both feasting and fasting - - can trigger the REALIZATION - - that we do NOT live - - by BREAD alone.

The Israelites - - as they FEASTED - - acknowledged - - that they did NOT live by bread alone - - but by the GRACE of God.

This year - - during Lent - - our theme is “Wandering and Coming Home”.

After a time of wandering - - or searching - - or fasting - - HOME is different.

But different in a GOOD way.

Maybe we appreciate it more - - instead of take it for granted.

What that puts us in touch with is that - - not everyone HAS a home.

Not everyone FEELS at Home.

And yet - - for MOST of us - - there is this DREAM - - of HOME.

Psalm 126 says that when the people of Israel - - finally return home - - they were “like a people in a DREAM”. / SO there is this dream - - of coming home - - for many people.

And to take the theme further - - the DREAM of coming HOME - - involves a kind of FREEDOM. / When we feel at home - - we are more FREE to - - reach out to others. / We are more open to God’s SPIRIT - - to move in our lives.

And feeling at home - - IS itself a kind of freedom.

As an example of this - - over the next four weeks - - I am encouraging us to look at four paintings by Norman Rockwell - - called the “Four Freedoms”. / These four paintings were painted in the early 1940s as the WW2 was ending. / They represent a kind of DREAM - - for Americans - - to feel at HOME - - by feeling more FREE. / The FOUR freedoms are: “freedom from WANT - - and freedom from FEAR - - and the freedom of SPEECH - - and freedom of RELIGION”.

This morning - - we look at “Freedom from WANT”

It shows a family sitting down to a Thanksgiving feast. / The grandmother is placing the TURKEY on the table - - and the grandfather is waiting to carve it. / But - - - the REST of the family - - are NOT looking at the TURKEY!

IT’s amazing!

They seem to hardly NOTICE the turkey at all.

What are they looking at? Each other!!

They are talking excitedly.

“Freedom from WANT” - - it seems - - is not necessarily JUST about freedom from want of FOOD - - just being fed. / It is about - - being filled - - by other things:

...being nourished by companionship.

Jesus - - who fasted in the wilderness - - is also called - - the BREAD of LIFE.

Food for the soul.

And we - - are the body of Christ.

Either feasting - - or fasting - - can be a way to find the FREEDOM - - to be truly at home with God - - in a world that would encourage us to GREED and isolation.

To be STEADFAST.

Years ago I met Caesar Chavez.

He led a campaign to boycott grape growers who were exploiting their workers.

Some people suggested violence against the big grape growing outfits.

But Caesar did something else - - he began a fast.

His fast - - originally was about calling attention to an injustice.

In addition to calling attention to injustice - - however - - Caesar said - - that in times then he needed spiritual STRENGTH - - he would fast.

So as we look ahead this week - - what will we do?

Whether we choose to feast or to fast - - or to do something else.

How can the way we live - - and the way we eat - - and the way we WANDER - - and the way we try to create a sense of home - - all - - in some sense - - be about - - HOLDING FAST?

Jesus said, "We do not live by bread alone".

From my own experience - - I can tell you - - I have fasted - - though not as long as Caesar Chavez. / The longest was three days.

You might think that your body would get weak when you fast. / Well I can tell you that it DOES. / Especially in the first two days.

But after a while the hunger - - goes away.

And EVEN in my hunger - - I realized - - that there is more to life.

And compared to some really STARVING people - - I'm not CLOSE to hungry.

Not even close.

And that realization - - effected me spiritually.

So I am NOT recommending that ANYONE - - put their health at risk.

Instead - - I AM urging - - that we all ask ourselves:

How am I being STEADFAST?

AM I being steadfast?

How we live our lives - - does make a difference in our spiritual life.

Are we preparing ourselves like Jesus did in the wilderness?

Are our FEASTS - - at least partly - - about being THANKFUL?

Does how we eat - - and how we live - - cause harm to others or the earth?

And if it does - - are there CHANGES we need to make?

Hopefully - - most of us have a long time left to live.

But no matter how long we have - - in another sense - - life is short.

The question is - - what will we do with our time?

Will we live the rest of our lives - - as FAST as we possibly can?

Or will we live the REST of our lives - - as STEADFAST as we can?

I hope we will all - - find some way - - to come home to STEADFASTness.

And that in doing so - - we will feel more FREE - - in our hearts - - and our lives.

Amen