

VITAL SIGNS

Sermon Series
LifeGroup Lesson - **Missions**
Isaiah 58:1-9a
January 11, 2015

OPENING PRAYER:

Spirit of wisdom and truth, shine your light into our hearts and lives. Awaken us where we slumber. Expose the darkness we try to hide. Uncover what we are afraid to see. Greet us with the warmth of Your love that we may choose to walk in Your grace and live by Your light. Amen.

BREAKING THE ICE:

- What did you agree or disagree with in the LifeTalk this week?
- What is your first reaction to seeing a homeless person on the street or seeing a news story on the homeless?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:¹

A missional church doesn't just give money, but serves others and offers the gospel of Jesus Christ. We do social justice to bring about God's Kingdom here on earth AND to spread the message of salvation. The ancient Israelites struggled with going through the motions of worship and serving God's people. **Read Isaiah 58:1-9a.**

- What do you think of these words from God delivered by the prophet Isaiah?
- In what ways did God's people seem to do the right thing? How did they spoil it?
- If their fasting had been sincere, what would have been different about their relationship with others?
- Note the relationship between the 'yoke of oppression' and the 'pointing finger'. Where should God's people be looking to discover and remove oppression?
- In what religious activities do you find yourself just going through the motions: attending church? Reading the Bible? Praying? Communion? Fasting? etc.
- How should these activities impact us individually and as a community? How are they affecting you now?
- Do you know any role models of this combination of piety and practical concern for others? How has their example affected you?

MORE TO PONDER:

For a Christian, Jesus is the man in whom it has indeed become manifest that revolution and conversion cannot be separated in man's search for experiential transcendence. His appearance in our midst has made it undeniably clear that changing the human heart and changing human society are not separate tasks, but are as interconnected as the two beams of the cross. Jesus was a revolutionary, who did not become an extremist, since He did not offer an ideology, but Himself. He was also a mystic, who did not use His intimate relationship with God to avoid the social evils of His time, but shocked His milieu to the point of being executed as a rebel. In this sense He also remains for nuclear man, the ways to liberation and freedom.

---Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*

- What strikes you about this passage?
- What do you understand Nouwen to be saying "changing the human heart and changing human society are not separate tasks, but interconnected...?"
- What do you hear in his words, "[Jesus] shocked His milieu to the point of being executed as a rebel"?
- What would it look like for you and your church to be shocking and considered a rebel? How would that feel to you?
- How can your church be in mission and connect it to the love of Jesus and making disciples?

CLOSING POSSIBILITIES:

- How will your life be different based upon what you have learned in this week's scripture, lesson and/or LifeTalk?
- How can the group pray for you this week?

ACTIVITIES FOR THE WEEK:

- How can you imitate your role model (from the question above) this week?
- Fast from food or other activities of self-fulfillment for one day this week. Decide how you can use that spiritual activity to help satisfy the needs of the oppressed and hungry?
- How can your small group move beyond the walls of the church into mission?

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK:

When the song of the angels is stilled
When the star in the sky is gone
When the kings and princes are home
When the shepherds are back with their flocks
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost; to heal the broken;
to feed the hungry; to release the prisoner;
to rebuild the nations; to bring peace among the people;
to make music in the heart.
-Howard Thurman

¹Adapted from *The Serendipity Bible* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1998)