

Grace and peace to you from our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our reading from Isaiah 58 God essentially says,
“Let’s stop pretending.”

Israel is fasting, praying, showing up for worship,
checking all the religious boxes — and God says,
“You think this is what I asked for?

You think this is the fast that moves My heart?”

It’s a jarring passage because it exposes something we don’t like to admit:
We can be very religious and still miss God entirely.

Isaiah says the people are seeking God “daily,”
delighting to draw near,

asking God for righteous judgments —
and yet their lives tell a different story.

They’re worshipping with their mouths while oppressing with their hands.

They’re bowing their heads in humility while
stepping on the backs of the vulnerable.

And God says, “No. That’s not it. That’s not the fast I choose.”

Instead, God points them toward a different kind of worship —
the kind that looks like loosening the chains of injustice,

freeing the oppressed, sharing bread with the hungry,
welcoming the homeless poor, clothing the naked.

In other words:

If your worship doesn’t change how you treat people, it’s not worship.

Isaiah is reminding us that God isn’t impressed by religious performance.

God is moved by transformed lives.

God is honored when our faith becomes embodied —
when it becomes visible, tangible, disruptive,
generous, inconvenient, compassionate.

And then Jesus picks up that same thread in Matthew 5.

“You are the salt of the earth.”

“You are the light of the world.”

Not: “Try to be salt.”

Not: “Work on being light.”

Not: “One day, if you’re holy enough, maybe you’ll shine.”

No — you already are.

Because God has claimed you, because Christ is in you,
because the Spirit is at work in you —
you *are* salt, you *are* light.

But Jesus also warns that salt can lose its saltiness.

Light can be hidden.

And how does that happen?

Not through sin in the dramatic sense —
but through complacency.

Through comfort.

Through a faith that becomes private, quiet,
self-contained, respectable.

Salt that stays in the shaker doesn’t season anything.

Light that stays under a basket doesn’t illuminate anything.

Jesus is saying what Isaiah said:

Faith that doesn’t show up in the world isn’t faith at all.

And then Jesus goes even further:

“I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them.”

In other words: “Don’t think I’m lowering the bar. I’m raising it.”

Jesus isn’t interested in a faith that checks boxes.

He’s interested in a faith that transforms hearts.

A faith that doesn’t just avoid doing harm but actively seeks to do good.

A faith that doesn’t just believe the right things but lives them.

So when we hold Isaiah and Matthew together, we hear a single, unified call:

Let your worship become justice.

Let your devotion become compassion.

Let your faith become visible.

Not because we’re trying to earn God’s love —
but because we’ve already received it.

Not because we’re trying to impress God —
but because God is already at work in us.

Not because the world needs perfect Christians —

but because the world desperately needs salty ones,
luminous ones, courageous ones.

Isaiah says that when we live this way —
when our faith becomes embodied —
“then your light shall break forth like the dawn.”
Jesus says, “Let your light shine before others,
so they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”
Both are saying the same thing:
The world is waiting for the people of God to actually look like the people of God.

So the question for us today isn't, “Are we religious enough?”
It's not, “Are we fasting correctly?”
It's not, “Are we checking the right boxes?”
The question is:
Does our faith make anyone's life better?
Does our worship loosen any chains?
Does our light help anyone see?
Does our salt bring any flavor of God's kingdom into the world?
Because when it does — when our faith becomes embodied,
when our worship becomes justice,
when our light actually shines —
then the world begins to see God.
Not because we're perfect, but because God's love is visible in us.

And maybe that's the hardest part of these passages:
they don't let us hide.
Isaiah won't let us hide behind religious activity.
Jesus won't let us hide behind spiritual identity.
Both of them are calling us out of the shadows of
comfortable faith and into the bright,
sometimes uncomfortable,
sometimes costly light of lived discipleship.

Because the truth is, it's easier to fast than to free the oppressed.

It's easier to pray than to share our bread.
It's easier to sing about justice than to practice it.
It's easier to talk about loving our neighbor than to
actually love the neighbor who frustrates us,
challenges us, or interrupts our plans.

But God isn't calling us to easy.
God is calling us to faithful.
And faithful looks like something.
Faithful looks like showing up for people who have been forgotten.
Faithful looks like speaking truth when silence would be more convenient.
Faithful looks like generosity that stretches us.
Faithful looks like compassion that costs us something.
Faithful looks like refusing to let cynicism have the last word.

Jesus says, "Let your light shine."
Not flicker. Not hide.
Not dim yourself to make others comfortable.
Shine.
Shine in such a way that people don't say,
"Wow, look at them," but instead say,
"Surely God is in this place."

Isaiah says that when we live this way —
when we loose the bonds of injustice,
when we share our bread, when we welcome the stranger —
then something happens not only in the world but in us.
"Then your healing shall spring up quickly."
There is a healing that comes from living outwardly what God has done inwardly.
There is a restoration that comes from aligning our lives with
God's heart for the world.

Maybe that's why Jesus insists that he hasn't come to
abolish the law but to fulfill it.
Because the law — at its core — was always about love.

Love of God.
Love of neighbor.
Love that is visible.
Love that is embodied.
Love that is practiced in the streets,
not just proclaimed in the sanctuary.

So the invitation today is simple, but not easy:
Let your faith be seen.
Let your worship be lived.
Let your light shine in such a way that someone else finds their way home.

Not because we're trying to prove anything.
Not because we're trying to earn anything.
But because this is who we are.
Salt.
Light.
People shaped by a God whose love always takes on flesh.
May we be that kind of people.
May we live that kind of faith.
And may the world see God because of it.
Amen.