

Message for Sunday, March 1, 2026

Scripture: Matthew 6:16; Acts 13: 2-3; Acts 14:23

Title: Fasting

Welcome

Announcements

Giving Options-in back, online, QR code, offering plate, etc.; The special offering for March will be the Old Town Mission; Book Club will meet on Tuesday, March 3 at 10:30AM in the Verde Hall; Learn to Knit or Crochet Class starting Monday, March 23rd at 10AM in the Fellowship Atrium; Be in prayer for our team of folks going to Boarder and Mexico this week.

Fellowship of Love

Song

Call to Worship

L: God calls us to set out in faith.

P: The love of God leads us home.

L: Christ blesses us that we might bless others.

P: The blessings of Christ heal our world.

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L: The Holy Spirit strengthens us for the journey.

P: **The One who made heaven and earth meets us here.**

Unison Prayer

Lord of light and love, your Spirit enlivens our spirits, even as your kingdom draws us to you.

May we be born from above, that our souls might ascend to your realm and taste the joy of eternal life in your name.

For you sent your Son into our world, not to condemn the world, but that all who enter into his light we might have life, and have it abundantly. Amen.

L: As we come to this time of offering, let us remember that giving is an opportunity to respond to God's generosity with our own.

Offering/Song

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¹⁶ “And whenever you fast, do not look somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

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³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

²³ And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.

Meditation: “Fasting”

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Fasting is one of those spiritual practices that we automatically think we know what it means, how to do it and why we do it. Most of us have grown up in traditions that teach that a Lenten discipline is fasting. The problem with this is of course is that we typically just assume everyone knows what fasting is, and what it does. While I spent most of my childhood in the Methodist church it wasn't until I was in college and heard a speaker at our chapel service who talked in depth about how to fast safely, or even what fasting is really about. Our meditation today though is about getting to the heart of why we fast and to invite you in with some simple practices.

Fasting is an expected experience of a Christian. The first scripture we read from Mathew, Jesus states "when you fast," notice that is "when" not "if." The two passages in Acts reminds us that fasting happens in the early church. If we leave scriptural times we find that the Orthodox and Catholic church both carried on the tradition of fasting, in the Catholic churches tradition they instituted fasting as well as feasting days. During the Protestant Reformation the practice of certain fasting and feasting days were abandoned but the

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practice of fasting was still encouraged. All the way through with John Wesley who insisted that those he ordained fasted at least twice a week.

So, fasting has a long history in the church rooted deeply in scripture but that doesn't tell us why we should do it or even how we should do it. Here's a way that I understand it, we fast, and in this case right now we are only talking about fasting from food, because it changes our relationship with our bodies and what we put into it. A funny way to see this comes from a commercial from years ago and many of you may remember these commercials,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnM-S-apl3E>

While this is a candy bar commercial you get the point. We know we are not the same people when we are hungry. Snickers taps into that to sell us candy bars, however as a spiritual practice God taps into that to help us focus more upon God and to resist the pull of our culture and our world. If we were to counter this commercial in particular instead of giving Marsha a Snickers we would have encouraged her to pray or meditate on God's goodness.

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The purpose of fasting is to turn us away from the demands of our bodies and focus upon God and what God wants us to experience about God. So, what are we to fast from? As I mentioned before I am looking at it as only food, however fasting can be more than just food. It is about opening yourself up to experiencing God. I'm saying this explicitly because when I was researching this message I saw advice from Christian authors claiming you can only fast from food, but that's not true. In fact, that isn't even biblical. In 1 Corinthians Paul talks about couples fasting from sex for spiritual purposes. So, if Paul references that I don't think it can be only about food.

With the understanding that it could be things other than food I do want to talk about some points that can make you more successful at fasting. Most of these apply directly to food but I think are applicable to other things as well. First you need to start small. Don't start at the beginning of Lent and think you are going to fast for two meals a day for 40 days. You don't work that way; nothing works that way. You need to build up your endurance so start with one day a week, or one meal a week. If you're fasting from something else like

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social media, decide on how you are going to limit that time, for example one hour a day.

Second, make a plan for the time that you have. If you give up a meal, what are you doing? Are you praying? Meditating? Volunteering? If you just fast and don't do anything with it-you aren't fulfilling the purpose of fasting and you are more likely to fail. Thirdly, if you are fasting make sure you consider others. Now you aren't supposed to be broadcasting that you are fasting (that goes directly against what Jesus teaches us), but if you have a weekly lunch with friends that is going to fall on your fast day tell them, communicate what is going on. Finally, turn your thoughts of hunger to something else. Most people when they fast think they have to feel miserable. "If I don't feel like I'm fasting then I'm not really fasting!" This is wrong headed. If you are fixated on your hunger then find a replacement.

If you are going to fast from food please consult a doctor if you have any medical issues. I'm not a doctor, and even if I were I wouldn't be one of those types of doctors. No spiritual practice is worth risking your life over. Also, never fast from water! You can try different types of fasts that may be more suitable

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for you like a juice fast, where you replace meals with juice to give you energy.

The point of this is to practice fasting safely.

There is one final item I want to go over with you, and that is to be careful fasting. While I've already gone over the medical stuff there is a spiritual danger with fasting. I have met people who feel they are better Christians than others because they fast so much. Essentially they are proud of their spiritual accomplishments. John Wesley, who again recommended fasting as a spiritual practice provides us with this warning, "Let us beware of fancying that we merit anything of God by our fasting. We cannot be too often warned of this; inasmuch as a desire to establish our own righteousness, to procure salvation of debt and not of grace is too deeply rooted in our hearts. Fasting is only a way which God hath ordained, wherein we wait for His unmerited mercy; and wherein without any desert of our ours, He hath promised freely to give us His blessing."

Any blessing you receive from fasting is a blessing given by God. Not something you earn, but another way you can experience your relationship with God. Amen.

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THE GREAT THANKSGIVING- Communion Liturgy

UMH pp. 13-16

L: The Lord be with you.

P: And also with you.

L: Lift up your hearts.

P: We lift them up to the Lord.

L: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

P: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

L: It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

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And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

P: Holy, holy, holy Lord,

God of power and might,

heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

L: Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ. By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection you gave birth to your church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

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L: On the night in which he gave himself up for us he took bread gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

L: When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

L: And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

P: Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

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L: Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

L: By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, now and forever.

P: Amen.

Communion:

All are welcome at this table. No matter who you are or where you've been or what you believe this is Christ's table and it is open to you. Come as you are and receive the gift of grace.

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Songs

Benediction

Song

Goodbye