

“Verbs”
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2-6-11

Isaiah 58 prescribes a list of actions preferred by God. If God’s people do choose to loose the bonds of injustice, they are promised their healing will spring up like the waters. In this passage, doing justice brings peace to all.

Not too long ago, it became en vogue to have your own mantra. Marisha Mahir Yogi introduced transcendental meditation and the use of mantras to millions. Mantras helped people center and find serenity in crisis, but mantras were also believed to create a more peaceful world. (A mantra in the Hindu Vedic tradition leads to spiritual transformation. Words to repeat to oneself on a path to spiritual bliss.)

In the 70’s, my Aunt Linda sought out a transcendental meditation teacher and paid him a hundred bucks. The ritual included a white handkerchief and a flower. She was given her mantra word and was told not to tell anyone else her mantra. I don’t know how long that lasted but she ended up finding out her boyfriend’s mantra was very similar. Her Mantra was aing-aing-aing. His was amma-amma-amma. Come to find out the business was only dolling out about 7 different mantras.

My mother skipped the tent and the 100 dollars and came up with her own mantra. Hers is green beans-green beans-green beans.

I think our church needs its own mantra in this time of transition.

humble ourselves God will notice us. If we fast God will hear our voice on high. But God says they are fasting for the wrong reasons. Their worship and ritual observances are not done in hopes of changing themselves but in hopes of changing God. God disdains false worship that does not lead to a new life, to a new way of being in the world.

Through this living letter, God asks us to choose a fast that loose the bonds of injustice, to break the yoke and let the oppressed go free. Sometimes the poetry of the Bible seems archaic or sometimes metaphorical, but these are not metaphors. These words speak truth to power in our time.

We don't have to go to Egypt to join in the setting the oppressed free. Our brothers and sisters in the tomato fields of Florida are pleading for us to loose the bonds of injustice. The Coalition of Immokalee workers, or CIW, is a group of 4000 farm workers who have come together to campaign against slavery, for safe working conditions, and for fair wages.

CIW has invited people of faith to fast for justice. And we have. Presbyterians have come along side Immokalee farm workers in solidarity for the last 15 years.

The fruits of our partnership are visible. A large number of corporations have signed an agreement with the Coalition of Immokalee workers. Taco Bell, Yum Foods, McDonalds, subway, burger king, whole foods, aramark, sodexo, and compass have all recognized their role in an oppressive system. They do not take pleasure in profiting from exploitation. So they have agreed to a zero tolerance policy against slavery, sexual harassment, and child labor. If a

love all the buy one get one frees. Shopping is a pleasure at Publix. It's pleasure when I get fresh bread from the bakery. It's a pleasure when the baker gives my son and daughter a cookie. It's a pleasure when I see their Greenwise coffee that boasts of fair trade and farmers' rights. But when I get to the produce section, and I see the bin of tomatoes it is no longer a pleasure. I wonder why I spend thousands a year at a grocery store that does not believe farm workers deserve rights. That they do not even deserve a hearing. It's not their problem.

Recently a Publix community relations manager said, "*We don't have any plans to sit down with the CIW.*" ... He added, "*If there are some atrocities going on, it's not our business.*"

Let that soak in. Atrocities—not our business.

Are atrocities our business?

Is human dignity the church's business?

Ponder with me the parable of the Good Samaritan.

A man was on the way from Immokalee to a tomato field.

He was attacked, beaten, stripped of his clothes and left half dead.

A priest happened to going down the same road and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side of the road—the beaten man was none of his business.

A Levite sees the man, and he too walked by on the other side—the abused was none of his business.

O but the Samaritan, the sweet, sweet Samaritan looked after the man with compassion.

Which one was the neighbor Jesus asked? Which one loved their neighbor?

Loving our neighbor is not always easy. It might mean we have to take risks. Moving into the public square can be dangerous even. But when justice rolls down like the waters, we will be glad we were not hiding from our neighbors. When justice rolls down like the waters, we will be glad we made justice our business.

What will be our mantra in the season to come? Which verbs will we choose?

Which verbs will make the church flourish?

Which verbs will result in transformation?

Which verbs make God's will on earth as it is in heaven?

Will we choose the verbs of Isaiah and Jesus and

loose the bonds

Break

Set free

Share

Bring homeless

Clothe the naked

And hear is the good news.

When we do our light will break forth like the dawn.

Our healing will spring up like the waters.

The Lord will guide us continually.

The Lord will satisfy our thirst in parched places.

And make our bones strong.

And we shall be like a watered garden.

Like a spring of water.

Whose waters never fail.