



FASTING FOR AN END TO INTERNATIONAL DEBT

Sample Meditation for a worship bulletin or to be read from the bimah

This month our congregation is participating in a "Rolling Fast" sponsored by the interfaith debt cancellation organization, Jubilee USA. Beginning on September 6, then "rolling" across the U.S., people of faith and conscience will be sacrificially giving up meals as a way of raising the visibility of, and being in solidarity with, the millions of people around the world who live in countries crippled by debt owed to the rich countries of the global north and to international entities like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. This morning we will commission those in our congregation who will be joining that fast.

There is a story in the 58th chapter of Isaiah in which God chastises those who fast for the wrong reasons. The Israelites had just returned to their homes after being freed from captivity in Babylon. But instead of working together to build a just and fair society, the wealthy took advantage of the poor – cheating them stealing from them, oppressing them, and driving them into debt. And when the poor could not pay their debts they were enslaved.

It is in this context that the wealthy wonder why God does not answer their prayers in the way they expect. They sing, they read scriptures and the Torah, and they fast, but all to no avail. In Isaiah 58, God tells the people that they cannot hear God's response because on their "fast day" they "quarrel and fight," oppress their workers, and hit each other "with a wicked fist." This is not the kind of fast that God wants.

What follows is a beautiful expression of the type fast that God desires from God's people:

to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke
to share bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
to cover the naked
and not to hide yourself from your own kin.

In effect, God was saying that if you are trying to please me by offering a fast that is not coupled with one of these things, then your fast will be empty and shallow. But if you fast (or sing and pray) while loosening bonds, undoing thongs, breaking yokes, sharing bread and all the rest, then ...

your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and God will say, Here I am.

It is in this spirit that members of our faith community will fast in support of proposals to Congress and the U.S. Treasury that could finally end the slavery to debt that has harmed too many lives in too many countries for too many years. We ask the congregation to prayerfully stand with them support them in their sacrifice. And we ask that each member of the congregation write to their Senator and Representative urging their support of the Jubilee Act and their opposition to the "Vulture Funds," which reap enormous profits by suing poor countries to collect on past unpayable debts. More information and sample letters on both of these issues will be available after the service.



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Prayer of Invocation

Leader: In the spirit of your Jubilee Year, O God, we remember the words in Leviticus to our ancestors in faith, to restore the homes and livelihoods of those who had been exiled by debt, by bondage, by poverty, by conflict.

People: **“On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. And you shall...proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you, when each of you [who has been impoverished] shall return to his property and each of you [who has been enslaved] shall return to his clan...It shall be a Jubilee for you” (Leviticus 25:12-13).**

Leader: In the spirit of your Sabbath Year, O God, we remember the words of Deuteronomy to our ancestors in faith, that there should be no one hungry among them, that they should cancel the debts of the poor, that they should free the slaves in their midst, restore them to dignity and help them to prosper.

People: **“At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release...every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor...because the Lord’s release has been proclaimed....there will be no poor among you” (Deuteronomy 15:1-2).**

Leader: In the spirit of your favored Year, O God, we remember the words of the prophet Isaiah, to our ancestors in faith, that those whom you have anointed are sent to comfort those who mourn, to lift up their devastated cities, to give them a garland instead of ashes.

People: **“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to those who are bound, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Isaiah 61:1).**

Leader: We pray all these things, O God for those in the world who suffer.

All: **Amen**



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Commissioning Service

Leader: We would like to invite the following people to come forward and receive our blessing and support for their ministry to the poor and hungry of the world.
(*Call names*).

These people are about to embark on the difficult and challenging task of participating in a national, rolling fast in solidarity with the people who go hungry across the world because their countries are impoverished by debilitating and crippling debts.



Today we support and send these good people who will be challenging their lives and their bodies for the ministry of faithful fasting.

All: We rejoice in your decision to keep alive the Jubilee vision of a world liberated from bondage and returned to God's wholeness.

Leader: Throughout history faithful people have awakened to God's justice and in turn have lived out that justice, challenging and changing the world. You are about to experience a great adventure of faith. You will never be the same after this event, and we pray that neither will we!

I invite you to please stand as we all say together:

**All: We will keep you in our prayers,
we will follow you in your progress,
we will write to our members of Congress, and
we will help awaken others to the cause,
as you are fasting and sacrificing on these days.**

Leader: Beginning on September 6, the Rev. David Duncombe will launch this national fast in Washington, DC to bring attention to the ongoing critical needs of millions of people in the world still living under the crushing burdens of their governments' debt. During that time fasters and others all across the country will be calling on Congress to pass the Jubilee Act, a bill calling for debt cancellation to address extreme poverty and just lending practices to prevent future debt crises.

All: We pledge to join with people of faith and conscience locally, nationally and around the world to deepen our knowledge and our faith and to work for God's Jubilee.

Leader: The work is long and it is never easy, but is the work of reconciliation and healing of the nations that God has called us all to do.

All: Amen.