

The Challenge of Hope

Isaiah 58:6-9a

'Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? 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 he will say, Here I am.'



Reflection In this passage from Isaiah, we see a deep challenge to forgo our tendency to remain in the comfort zone that religion can become. We are challenged to share our bread with the hungry, to look after the poor and homeless, to clothe those who need clothing, and look after our kin. From a heavenly perspective we are all kin. To care for 'the least of these'⁴ is to carry out our divine calling. The good news is that this calling needn't be a burden. God tells us that when we call for help, God will say 'Here I am'. The Lord will guide us continually. We do not go alone. God promises to satisfy our needs and make us strong.

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The passage goes on to say that when we do God's work in the world, our light will rise in the darkness. Imagine if the global church was in the business of meeting the needs of the poor and oppressed, we would be like a freshly watered garden, never drying up or dying out. Our collective hope propels us forward, knowing that God has a bigger plan for the world than we could ever understand. Our hope also comes from knowing that God uses us to bring peace and comfort to the world. Let's not despair, and let's not miss our calling. In this passage God provides both a challenge and a promise. We are challenged to step out of our comfort zones and partner with God in the mission of restoration in the world. And we are promised that we are not alone; we have one another, and even better than that, we have a God who works through us, and provides the strength we need.



Hannah Maule-ffinch/Tearfund

PRAYER

'Save us Lord from a religion that ignores the cries of the exploited and oppressed. Lead us into a deeper faith that challenges injustice and makes the sacrifices that must be made to build a society that is ever more truly human. Amen'⁵