



The Irony of Hubris
Isaiah 58:1-12

February 14th, 2018 • Ash Wednesday,
First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois
The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel

In her book *When I Was a Child I Read Books*, Marilynne Robinson, the author of the Pulitzer Prize winning book *Gilead*, wrote, "We have given ourselves many lessons in the perils of being half right, yet I doubt we have learned anything . . ."

We all know about hubris. We know that pride goeth before the fall. The problem is that we don't recognize pride or hubris in ourselves ... any more than Job's so-called comforters. It can be so innocuous-seeming a thing as confidence that one is right, is competent, is clear-sighted, or confidence that one is pious or pure in one's motives. (When) the disciples said, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible," in this case speaking of the salvation of the pious rich. It is his consistent teaching that the comfortable, the confident, the pious stand in special need of the intervention of grace.

Perhaps this is true because they are the most vulnerable to error - like the rich man who makes the astonishing decision to turn his back on Jesus's invitation to follow him, therefore on the salvation he sought.... The words from the prophet Isaiah reminded me of Marilynne Robinson's insight into human nature.

In tonight's reading Isaiah declares God's anguish.

Day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. "...Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? Is 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 neighbor? ... If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose water never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt' you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets.

You see, the problem that Isaiah confronts us with is this: if we receive the ashes of Lent, and if we receive the elements of the Table, thinking ourselves pious and holy, but are not changed, really changed, changed in our heart, our soul, then we are, in the words of Paul to the Corinthian church eating and drinking damnation unto ourselves. Drawing closer to God is not about ritual or tradition. It is about living to the glory of God. It is about sharing our food with the hungry, caring for the homeless, meeting the basic human needs of the least, the last and the lost. It is not hiding ourselves from the pain of the world behind fortress walls be they a sanctuary, a tradition, a home, or a border.

It is about being the light of God's Kingdom here on earth in this world that already has too much darkness. It is about being "repairers of the breach". It is about being, truly being, a people of God.

Amen.