

Fasts and Feasts

Very short readings for Lent and Holy Week



Thom M Shuman

wild goose
publications



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Introduction

We all know that Lent is that season when we are supposed to fast from something – give up some bad habit, like smoking, chocolate, caffeine. And like New Year resolutions, such promises come to a dramatic end: as soon as we pass a bakery or walk into a coffee shop. But I have noticed that, all too often, those of us who try to follow Jesus seem not to have such a difficult time fasting from things like justice, hope, grace, wonder – many times for longer than 40 days! So, these nudges are little reflections on how it seems easier to abstain from the very things we should be doing, than from those we shouldn't. And following the ancient tradition of viewing the Sundays of Lent as feast days (because one's physical fast could be broken by Communion), the Sunday nudges are about justice, hope, grace, wonder, joy ... I hope these words are faithful companions on your Lenten journey of fasts and feasts.

Thom M Shuman

Ash Wednesday

our hosanna faith
flames brightly
until combusting
into a pile of
ashes, which
you gather
and shape into
a heart, the
spirit and image
of your own.

Fast 1

typically, i
find it easier
to fast
from too much
compassion,
than chocolate ...

Lord, in your mercy.

Fast 2

every morning,
i pour a big bowl
of grudges
for breakfast, leaving
the box of

gratitude
unopened on the
shelf.

Fast 3

i easily
scoop up
prejudice
in my arms
when it runs
to me, while
turning my back
on
justice.

Feast 1

in the warmth
of your love, the
glacier of our
apathy begins to melt,
until,
drip by drip, hope
becomes a river
carrying outsiders
to life.

Fast 4

given the chance
to welcome
strangers, why
do we remain
in our seats
sitting on
our hands?

Fast 5

i could
play in your
fields
flowing with faithfulness,
but it would
mean getting
off the
fence.

Fast 6

when i could
binge
on your
joy, i
usually stay on
the wagon
driven by gloomy Gus.

Fast 7

it seems
so much easier
to curb my
patience
than rein
in
my
irritability.

Fast 8

i could reach
out
to pick up
the fallen, but
i think i will
just
keep sitting
on my
hands.

Fast 9

driving down
life
washboarded by
hurts, i

could turn down
Forgiveness Lane,
but don't.

Feast 2

it might be
finding that will
to keep saying
yes to that won't;
it might be
struggling with
that new discipline
until it leaves you
limping;
it might be
putting aside a
no-longer-used item
for someone who
would treasure it;
but
at the heart
of Lent
is
praise.

Fast 10

we could carry
living water
for those we meet
on this day's journey,
but we leave
the bucket behind,
claiming the well
has gone dry.

Fast 11

when hope calls,
i simply press
'ignore',
and
then delete the
voicemails
without ever listening.

Fast 12

as long as
i
continue to
do without
your silence,
words will flood
out of me

sweeping you
further away.

Fast 13

when it
comes
to inclusion, i
usually deny
i know anyone
who might be a
stranger.

Fast 14

you would send us
to be tzaddiks,
with words of justice
and peace for our world,
but we choose to become
talking heads of
anger and division.

Fast 15

when we could offer
our hearts to you
to be filled with compassion,
we soak them
in the water of stubbornness,

and bake them in rebellion's heat
until they are tough enough
to withstand your
tender pleas.

Feast 3

when we awake
in night's middle hours
and reach for that glass
of bitter tears which sits
on the night stand, may
we find that you have
transformed it into
the cup of grace
which fills us with peace
so that we can fall asleep
in your hope.

Fast 16

folk are
always offering ways
to serve others,
but
i have taken
a pledge
not to get too
involved.

Fast 17

Spirit
offers to teach
me everything
i need
to be and do
as God hopes, yet
i will not stroke
the spine to open
the book.

Fast 18

somehow,
i always seem
to duck out
of the way
when kindness
tries to reach
out
and kiss me.

Fast 19

on the road
to tenderness, i
stop and pick up
hatred, hitchhiking
by the side of the road,

then make a U-turn
in the other direction.

Fast 20

laughter
could improve
every weary
moment, but
i would rather
keep sucking
life's lemons.

Fast 21

rather than
muzzle my
mouth, it
is so much more
delicious
to let the
words dripping
with bitterness
run free.

Feast 4

here,
at your table,
grace

is passed to us
by the person
we resent, as
we are invited
to share it with
the person we
haven't spoken to
in years.

Fast 22

when
it comes to
generosity, i
am always
willing to give
you
the shirt off
your back.

Fast 23

like a pebble
in a shoe,
kindness
can rub a blister
on my hubris, until
i take it out,
toss it aside,
and stubbornly
keep on my way.

Fast 24

the sommelier
decants a bottle
of grace, and
as the bouquet
fills the air,
i turn my
glass upside down
on the table and
tuck into my
plate of misery.

Fast 25

you send a
joyfall
to blanket our
lives,
but we get
out the shovels,
clearing the path
to bitterness
parked in the
driveway.

Fast 26

i could say
no
to deep-dish

pity, but
i just slide
a couple of
slices onto
the plate and
sit down to watch
the game.

Fast 27

seduction's snakes
wend their way
across the floor to
ribbon themselves
around me, but
rather than driving them
away,
i sit down
and play.

Feast 5

cracked and mottled,
you could throw us
out with the rest of the junk,
but you gather us
close to your heart,
polishing us with grace
until we mirror
the gleam in your eye.

Fast 28

you put out
the welcome mat,
leaving the door
to life wide open,
but
i keep lodging at
Shoulds Boarding House,
along with the Musts
and Have Tos.

Fast 29

i always have words
for belittling others,
arguing with my worries,
grumbling about life, but
when i try to gather
them up in
prayer
i become speechless.

Fast 30

when you open
the taps so justice
and hope can tumble forth
and cascade through the streets,
too often we

rush to the curb
to locate the
main shut-off valve
to close it
until you calm down.

Fast 31

we could palliate
the suffering of
those everywhere,
but continue
to pick the scabs
off
and salt the
raw places of
the world.

Fast 32

we could make justice
our sacrifice for others,
but why waste it on them?

Fast 33

your faithfulness is
the coat we leave back at home
as we walk through life.

Palm Sunday

grasping the palm branches,
scooping up dust to bottle
as a souvenir,
thinking, 'I'll never wash that coat
again,'
we can't let go of
who we want you to be,
and follow you to where
you will show your true self.

Fast 34

truth be told, we race
down bogus pathways, to play
in evil's puddles.

Fast 35

called to be a light,
we crawl into our closets,
pulling the door shut.

Fast 36

we sit at the table,
moving the food around our plates,
wondering if we dare admit,
'it's me: i will turn my back
on you first chance i get.'

Holy Thursday

we'd sooner have a root canal
than take off our shoes and
let you clean our souls.

Holy Friday

with so many
meetings
services
chores
groceries to buy
eggs to decorate,
i don't think our paths will
cross
today, Jesus ...
sorry.

Holy Saturday

like
the space between words,
the pause of the second
hand ticking on,
the abyss before the
next note is played,
we wait
in the shimmering silence
of kairos
on this day.

Easter Sunday

we could turn
from the mystery
and sadly go home, or
keep turning
until we see you
and hear you
call us by name.

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