# It is a pleasure to be here with you again, and in person, finally. I have had the pleasure of meeting some of you in person over the past couple years in person, and many of you virtually. It is an honor to be here with you. I was remarking to someone the other day just how much I love and admire the community of 8th Day. I am sure there is more to your fellowship and ministry than what has come across my experiences so far but it is very impressive how you seek to do more with little and share what you have to right some of the wrongs in the world around us. Having been a guest with you, and as one of the racial justice accountability group members, it has been a gift to watch the intentions, challenges, struggle and progress in so many areas and it is really nice to be here in the house with you.

# Today, we are going to talk about “Shackles”. Shackles among us, on us, and infecting us so that today the work is not yet done. And with all that you have done we know the work is not yet done. We can just look around us and see that the work is not yet done. But why? Why has there seemed to be so much progress but so little change at the same time? So much sacrificed, given…, so many lives lost- blood sweat and tears…, so many advances… and yet we still are plagued with poverty, racism, sexism, classism, transphobia/homophobia, victimization of the vulnerable, criminalization of the poor, government turning its back on the people and in so many places the Church not only being complicit but leading the charge. It is as if the Poor People’s Campaigns of the old and new had not occurred and that we had not had relief programs that should have lifted more of our siblings out of crisis. It is as if the Civil Rights Movements, Women’s Liberation Movement, the Gay (Queer, LGBTQ and SGL) movements, instead of precise surgical and medicinal social justice, political, and cultural change, were instead like zits on an adolescent’s face – numerous and an annoyance but not removed.

# I recall as a child that I used to have this two sided pillow one side said Women’s Lib and the other side, I cannot recall. While one would think that the pillow is inconsequential but in fact it was a constant teaching that shaped my feminist and inclusive consciousness and shaped how I would view the world, my place in it, the proper dynamics between the many sexes, genders, and identities. So, it is baffling to me that in 2023 we would still be battling pay equity and women’s control over their bodies or even pushing back on narratives that would seek to erase trans experience and deny people basic human rights and dignity.

# The same is true when we look and see that rather than a decrease in police brutality we see constant recordings, news flashes, and marches to declare Black Lives Matter even as another Black life is stolen over routine traffic stops and other fear based deaths. Fear in this case seems to be an oxy moron and unfathomable. Maybe we have not really thought of it but when you have the full weight of the government, body armor, tasers, guns, and a virtual domestic army how can you feel threatened for your life from one person in a car, or walking down the street, or running away from you- especially when no violent crime has been committed? You have the power, all the power, and even take more power by negating the humanity of the person. It would seem to me that if you were fearful of your life you would wait for back-up but once back-up is available you have the power so the loss of life is unnecessary. How do I know? Well I am glad you asked. In most cases when the suspect is not Black or Brown different tactics are used (which are well recorded and documented) and those perpetrators are alive to have their day in court and serve punishments for their actual crimes. The difference is that in many cases these people did do the crime but live to be accountable and often times the Black and Brown person actually did not commit a crime other than being of the despised race or ethnicity.

# And the list goes on for each of the areas where we wanted to progress but we see we actually have not. Like zits on an adolescents face numerous and continuous often no matter what you do.

# BUT Why? Why? Why? Scripture tells us that God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, love, and a sound mind. But we are not using any of it. And I dare say, if I can speak for God, God is none to pleased. With all the limitless resources of God’s vast universe, we are still not much better than at any other time in the known history of life on the planet.

# Our scripture today gives is insight into how God may see us today.

*(Reference) Isaiah 58:1-12 (NIV)*

***58 1****“Shout it aloud, do not hold back.
    Raise your voice like a trumpet.
Declare to my people their rebellion
    and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.****2****For day after day they seek me out;
    they seem eager to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that does what is right
    and has not forsaken the commands of its God.
They ask me for just decisions
    and seem eager for God to come near them.****3****‘Why have we fasted,’ they say,
    ‘and you have not seen it?
Why have we humbled ourselves,
    and you have not noticed?’*

*“Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please
    and exploit all your workers.****4****Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
    and in striking each other with wicked fists.
You cannot fast as you do today
    and expect your voice to be heard on high.****5****Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
    only a day for people to humble themselves?
Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed
    and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
    a day acceptable to the Lord?*

***6****“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
    and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
    and break every yoke?****7****Is it not to share your food with the hungry
    and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
    and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?****8****Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
    and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+58%3A1-12&version=NIV#fen-NIV-18795a)*] will go before you,
    and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.****9****Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
    you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.*

*“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
    with the pointing finger and malicious talk,****10****and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
    and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
    and your night will become like the noonday.****11****The Lord will guide you always;
    he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
    and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
    like a spring whose waters never fail.****12****Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
    and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
    Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.*

# We are much like our ancient siblings who also did some good things but changed very little in the process. The shackles were not only on the people IN the people. Not only were some being oppressed but the oppressors were and are too oppressed. I had some conversations recently and noted that we cannot truly say we are fighting oppression and have no compassion for the oppressor. Because the oppressor is really operating from a self-inflicted form of oppression. The need to “other” someone else, to subjugate them, to manipulate and control them, to own them, to limit them, to devalue their lives, or to deny them rights or dignity is by any other name oppression. Now having compassion does not mean pacifying, excusing, or tolerating oppression. It does mean contextualizing to understand that when one is the oppressor or the oppressor class (as in benefiting from the oppression without necessarily participating directly in the oppressive behaviors) the choice to be or stay in this framework is also oppression. Denying humanity of others is also denying humanity to yourself. The losses are great on each side of oppression. Now we fight like hell to end oppression but we have to also do so, as Christian people, with love. It might be tough love, and even tough to love, but we are compelled to do what we do for right, to be done with the right heart and intention.

# Here is another witness of the scripture you hear earlier:

Isaiah 58:1-12 (The Voice)

**58 1Eternal One:** Tell My people about their wrongdoing;
        shout with a voice like a trumpet;
    Hold nothing back: say this people of Jacob’s line and heritage
        have failed to do what is right.

**2**    And yet they look for Me every day.
        They *pretend to* want to learn what I teach,
    As if they are indeed a nation good and true,
        as if they hadn’t really turned their backs on My directives.
    They even ask Me, *as though they care,*
        about what I want them to be and do, as if they really want Me in their lives.

**3People:** Why didn’t You notice how *diligently* we fasted before You?
        We humbled ourselves *with pious practices* and You paid no attention.

**Eternal One:** *I have to tell you,* on those fasting days,
        all you were *really* seeking was your own pleasure;
    Besides you were busy *defrauding people and* abusing your workers.
**4**    Your *kind of* fasting *is pointless, for it* only leads to *bitter* quarrels,
        contentious *backbiting,* and vicious fighting.
    You are not fasting today because you want Me to hear your voice.
**5**    What kind of a fast do I choose? Is a true fast simply
        *some religious exercise* for making a person feel miserable and woeful?
    Is it about how you bow your head (like a *bent* reed), how you dress (in sackcloth), and where you sit (in a bed of ashes)?
        Is this what you call a fast, a day the Eternal One finds good and proper?
**6**    No, what I want in a fast is this:
        to liberate those tied down and held back by injustice,
        to lighten the load of those heavily burdened,
        to free the oppressed and shatter every type of oppression.
**7**    A fast *for Me* involves sharing your food with people who have none,
        giving those who are homeless a space in your home,
    Giving clothes to those who need them, and not neglecting your own family.

**8**Then, *oh then,* your light will break out like the *warm, golden rays of a* rising sun;
    in an instant, you will be healed.
Your rightness will precede *and protect* you;
    the glory of the Eternal will follow and defend you.
**9**Then when you do call out, *“My God, Where are You?”*
    The Eternal One will answer, “I am here, *I am here.*”
If you remove the yoke of oppression *from the downtrodden among you,*
    stop accusing others, and do away with mean and inflammatory speech,
**10**If you make sure that the hungry and oppressed have all that they need,
    then your light will shine in the darkness,
And even your bleakest moments will be bright as a clear day.
**11**The Eternal One will never leave you;
    He *will* lead you *in the way that you should go.*
When you feel dried up *and worthless,*
    God will nourish you and give you strength.
And you will grow like a garden *lovingly* tended;
    you will be like a spring whose water never runs out.
**12***You will discover* there are people among your own
    who can rebuild *this broken-down city out of* the ancient ruins;
You will firm up its ancient foundations.
    And *all around,* others will call you
“Repairer of Broken Down Walls” and “Rebuilder of Livable Streets.”

Why, then, if we have a clear message from the Divine, why do we still, thousands of years later, fail, epically? We fail because we thought we were being liberators to remove the shackles off the feet of others and we fail daily to remove the shackles off our own feet, hands, and minds. We remain bound to the systems and structures that provided the foundations for oppression and we benefit from them so much so that we see them as normal, right, and for some righteous.

All the good we do is worthless if we do not also do it with the right spirit and intention. Scripture tells us we are the salt of the earth, we are the light of the world. How then can we be salt or light, if we fail to unpack for ourselves the prominent place of power that we hold in our consciousness? Unless we unshackle and liberate our own minds and spirits we can never hope to eradicate ills and produce any form of social justice. God is asking us today, when will we go beyond the surface of experience to create real change? The change we wish to see in the world is evasive because we are still shackled to paradigms, structures, and the benefits of the tools of the oppressors. Jesus gave us the best examples when in every way he intentionally pushed against the pharisees and the religious right of the day to challenge customs and the thinking of the people around him. He removed shackles not just of the physical issues but he also removed mental and spiritual shackles. I know some may say “but that was Jesus” as if that means somehow that we are less than. Jesus told us “greater things would we do”. If we remain shackled to the idea that we are too small, powerless, or “it’s the best we can do…” then we remain the oppressor while masquerading as Moses’ (liberators) or Jesus’ (saviors) because we believe that to do good is to be good without really understanding that to be good means to shift from and walk away from the very roots, comforts, and privilege of oppression. The oppressed are shackled and the oppressor is shackled. They are both shackled to the system the difference is that one benefits and the other does not. The only way to be unshackled is to be liberate ourselves from the foundations of oppression and like Jesus push beyond the acceptable societal and religious behaviors to do what is truly right for people that we encounter daily.

Beloved, we do good work. 8th Day, does amazing work. Yet in the context of the work very little changes because people are still shackled to the essence of the injustices that we want to challenge. As long as you are not willing to fight against tyranny of the state and the cultural acceptance of the concepts of “the other” you give tacit approval and “support everything changing” but staying the same. You can call yourselves progressives while in actuality enacting conservative values and therefore manifesting modern change as nuanced oppression. We replace the appearance of our shackles but they are shackles none the less. Old iron shackles become nice Tiffany bracelets. Shackles transform from smelted materials to fashion symbols. Shackles transform from whips and chains, lynchings, to health disparities, poor education, gentrification, inequity, injustice, wage theft, and dead bodies in streets. If you are not challenging the very assumptions by which you live, and the very privilege by which you have what you have, you are still the oppressor and benefiting from oppression. God continues to call this out as we see in our text; we are failing, pretending, acting like we care, being pious, defrauding, abusing……basically, pointless.

There is good news!!!We are compelled by the word of the prophet that tells us ‘only what we do for Christ will last’. And only when we see the shackles, not just on the “other” but on ourselves can we begin to use our power and privilege to unshackle and change oppression but we also can unshackle and change the oppressor. The best of the good news is that today you can decide just how much more you will be a true agent of change and unshackle yourself and then work to do so for others even more. The good news is that today we live and can do better. The good news is that today we have the ability to look at all our “progress” and determine that we can still use ourselves and our resources to make true progress if we choose to unshackles ourselves while we unshackle others. It’s a good day to be alive and to hear the Word of God and act to be the change we wish to see in the world – for ourselves, our neighbors, and for the sake of the Christ.