



A Case for Fasting

By The Rev. Jarrett Kerbel (3/06/26)

During my sermon last Sunday I remarked on my practice of fasting on Fridays. I would like to say more about fasting and even recommend the practice for folks who feel drawn to it, and who are in good physical and mental health.* For me, fasting is one more way to lay out a welcome mat for God and to increase my capacity to attend to his ever-present beckoning to me.

You know why they call it fasting, don't you? You want it over as fast as possible so you can eat!

There is truth to that statement for sure, and it goes deeper than a cheap joke. Fasting changes our relationship with time and with our desires. Hunger is a desire that structures our day around meals and accelerates our attention toward satisfaction three or four times per day. When we take away the possibility of eating, our day suddenly loses its normal structure, its compelling sense of direction, and its motivation toward immediate gratification.

In this newly opened up space, we replace hunger pangs with prayer and contemplation on the near presence of God. Every time my stomach reminds me of my need to eat, I redirect my attention to prayer. I also can redirect my imagination to Jesus, specifically, the pain he suffered for us, thus growing in empathy, gratitude and endurance by drawing closer to our suffering Savior.

By the way, any desired source of satisfaction/gratification can stand in for food. Screen time, entertainment, sex, booze, drugs, caffeine, tobacco, shopping, video gaming, and gambling are all worthy objects of a fast. In fact, my second experiment with fasting was a social media fast during Lent 2020. Giving up all social media - essentially detoxing from the algorithm and the vile spew it served me every day -

opened up so much space for God and so much spiritual freedom in my soul that I never went back.

The social media example - a screen fast - is a good example of another dimension of fasting. In its most basic sense, fasting is refraining from consumption. In a consumer economy driven by rabid attention seeking algorithms, such restraint is a radical act. Remember that 'radical' means rooted, as in rooted in what is most essential. To pull up roots in social media and nurture our rootedness in God is a radical act that resists potent forces that only wish to mold us into consumers of things and experiences.

Last week, I did an online search for a wood chipper. Now, I only see ads for wood chippers when I read the Bangor Daily News online. The algorithm is out to get me and it thinks it knows me. How do I respond? I fast. I renounce my identity as a consumer and embrace communion with God as the sole source, purpose and end of my life.

*Fasting is absolutely discouraged for anyone struggling with an eating disorder, for example. There are many other practices to recommend, so no worries.