

## WEI-JEN CHARING CHEN, PHD STUDENT CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Lent 2019  
Isaiah 58: 1-12

We can still notice their existence on the street: they fast and pray outside the government buildings, quote from authorities to condemn homosexuals, saying they are diseased and sick, that they should definitely not be permitted to marry, in the sake of the peace and harmony of the family structure and our nation. Not long ago, that park was surrounded by them for the nation-wide cooperation across denominations to oppose the referendums of same-sex marriage. They claimed, God loves their deeds and actions, and they encouraged each other to fast to show their determination and put protest into practice as a witness for God. “We are the soldiers of God” they sang in their hymns.

However, while the government proposed a bill draft according to their opinions, they got angry and protest again against that bill, saying, we could only allow those homosexuals to have “civil union” rather any sort of “marriage.” They protested on the street again and proclaimed that judgment and punishment from God are coming toward this government and those homosexuals. “God’s sacred marriage is heterosexual monogamy only” and “kids should stay in heterosexual families to grow normally, to earn the blessings from God.” They believed that all that this government has done is against the revelation of their God.

But, what has this “fasting” and “just behavior” achieved? God seems not to hear from you nor see what you have sacrificed. Did not the prophet tell us, to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 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? Why did those folks who call their act “in the name of God” do the opposite things and let the others roam all over the place and find no home? Do we hear the crying from those who are suffering? And all sorts of wounds made in the name of God? And the structural sin we have gotten involved?

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Pài-sa<sup>n</sup> Sèng-hu-jit ê su-khó (Tâi-gí-lô-má-jī, (Taiwanese), by Tân Uí-jîn  
Keng-bûn: Í-sài-a-su 58:1-12

lú-goân tī koe-lō'khòa<sup>n</sup>-tioh hiah-ê lâng: in tú-á-chiah tī cheng-hú tōa-lâu gōa-bīn kìm-chiah kī-tó, ín-iōng keng-bûn kap gián-kiù kóng tông-sèng-lôan sī chit-chióng pē<sup>n</sup>, chōat-tùi m̄-thang hō'ín lâi kiat-hun, bô-chiá òe chō-sêng ka-têng kap kok-ka ê tông-lôan. Bô-lōa-kú í-chêng, in chiong kong-hîng pau-úi kī-lâi, hoat-tōng chōan-kok-sèng ê oah-tāng kap kàu-phài hạp-chok, ēng chōan-pō'ê khui-lat lâi hóan-tùi tông-sèng-lôan hun-in ê kong-bīn tâu-phiò. In kóng, Siōng-tè ì-ài in án-ne ê hêng-tōng, jī-chhiá<sup>n</sup> koh kó-lê thong-kòe kìm-chiah chiá<sup>n</sup>-chòe in koat-sim lip-chì, ēng sīt-chè ê khòng-gī hêng-tōng chòe kiàn-cheng.

「Góan sī Ki-tok ê cheng-peng」 in ê si-koa sī án-ne gîm.

m̄-koh, tong-sī cheng-hú àn-chiàu in só'chú-tiu<sup>n</sup> ê kong-bīn tâu-phiò thê-chhut hoat-àn liáu-āu, in khiok chìn-chit-pō' lāi hóan-tùi, kóng hit kún tông-sèng-lôan chí-ū 「kiat-hap」 ê hūn bô 「kiat-hun」 ê miá. iū-koh tī koe-thâu loān, jīn-úi Siōng-tè ài-beh hō'kong-gī tit-tioh ūn-hêng, beh hō'chit-ê cheng-hú kap hit-kún tông-sèng-lôan tit-tioh hêng-hoat. 「Siōng-tè só'siat-lip sîn-sèng ê hun-in sī it-hu-it-chhe」, 「gín-á ài tòa-tī ì-sèng-lôan ê ka-têng tióng-kan tōa-hàn chiah-ê cheng-siōng, chiah-ê tit-tioh hêng-hok.」 in jīn-úi cheng-hú it-chhè phái<sup>n</sup>-sò-kiá<sup>n</sup> ôan-chōan úi-pōe Siōng-tè ê khé-sī.

Khiok-sī, án-ni ê kìm-chiah kap gī-hêng kám-ū siá<sup>n</sup>-mih lī-ek-lâng ê só'chāi? Kám-kak-tioh Siōng-tè thia<sup>n</sup>-bē-tioh lín ê kī-tó, lín ê só-kiá<sup>n</sup> mā-sī khang-khang. Sian-ti kám-m̄-sī í-keng kā lán kóng, tháu-khui hong-ok ê soh, tháu-pàng pē-ta<sup>n</sup> ê soh, hō'siū chē-ap-ê tit-tioh chū-iū, kòng-chiū it-chhè ê ta<sup>n</sup> mah? Tùi lí tióng-kan tū-khì tâng ê ta<sup>n</sup>, lín-bín iau-gō ê lâng, hō'khùn-khó'ê lâng tit-tioh móa-chiok mah? Kàu-ta<sup>n</sup>, hong Chú ê miá chò-tāi-chì ê lâng, khiok tī kái phái<sup>n</sup>-lō; hō-lâng bô-i-bô-óa, lán kám-ū thia<sup>n</sup>-kì<sup>n</sup> thī-khàu ê sia<sup>n</sup>, siū-khó'ê sin-ía<sup>n</sup>? Lím-lím-chóng-chóng hong Chú ê miá só'chō-sêng ê sióng-hāi? í-kíp khan-siap-tioh lán só'chō-sêng kiat-kò'kap hē-thóng ê phái<sup>n</sup>-tāi?

## WEI-JEN CHARING CHEN, PHD STUDENT CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Lent 2019  
Isaiah 58: 1-12

聖灰三日點默想(Mandarin), by 陳煒仁  
經文：以賽亞書58:1-12

依然可以在街頭看見一群人：他們剛剛才在政府大樓外禁食禱告，引經據典地說同性戀是病，絕對不可以讓他們結婚，否則會造成家庭與國家的動亂。不久之前，他們把公園包了下來，全國串連發動了罕見的教派合作，傾全力動員反對同性婚姻的公投連署。他們說，上帝喜愛他們這樣的行動，並且鼓勵用禁食成為他們立志的決心，並用實際的抗議行動成為見證。「我們是基督的精兵」他們的詩歌是這樣說的。

然而，當政府依照他們所主張的公投訴求提出了法案之後，他們卻進一步地反抗，認為那群同志只能「結合」不能「結婚」，又再次鬧上了街頭，認為上帝將要行公義並懲罰這個政府以及那群得病的同性戀們。「上帝所訂的一夫一妻婚姻是神聖的」，「孩子要在異性戀的家庭中長大才會正常，才會幸福。」他們認為政府的這一切做法完全違背了他們的上帝的啟示。

這樣的禁食與義行成就了什麼呢？上帝似乎聽不見也看不到你們的做為。經文豈不是已經告訴了我們，要鬆開兇惡的繩，軛上的索，讓被欺壓的得自由嗎？要除掉重軛，施憐憫，使人得滿足嗎？如今，奉主名的行的人，卻倒行逆施，使人無處可依。我們是否能聽見哭泣的聲音，受苦者的身影呢？以及，種種奉主名所造成的傷害？以及所涉入制造結構性之惡的行動？

## REV. JEFFREY DODSON, MDIV '14 GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO

Lent 2019  
Isaiah 45: 1-2

### **BREAKING INTO THE CHURCH**

“Thus says the Lord to the anointed... whose right hand I have grasped... to open doors before him— and the gates shall not be closed: “...I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron.”

My daughter in my arms, I realized I needed to go, I grabbed my belongings, entered the car and drove here, my mind still remembering the soft grasp of her hands around my neck.

Two women who probably weren't trying to break into the church were waiting for me, I smiled and thought how lucky I was to arrive just in time to open the doors.

In the class I talked about anxiety and tepidness. I talked about my fears of sharing my gifts publicly, about how vulnerable it feels to tell my personal story. How I yearn to be known and yet at the same time am afraid of being known. So the class talked about their fears. And their anxiety and tepidness of coming to the church to share their stories.

There was a moment, when the doors were locked, when it would have been easy to turn away and go back home. And not share, and not be vulnerable. And not be the church. And yet we did. In community. In love. In affirmation.

Most days I am the preacher and teacher, but today in this group I am the one who will help these people break into the church, and open doors that my daughter will one day walk through.

Prayer: God, break into my heart, and help me enter into sacred space where I may create the world I want our children to grow up in. Amen.

Psalm 55: 1-2

### **FLYING**

“And I say, “O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.”

The hospital was new to me. My first day of being a Chaplain Resident was mostly orientations and learning names, but then came the moment to make my first pastoral care visit. I felt like an eaglet being pushed out of the nest.

My feet moved like it was the longest walk in my life. I finally made it to the doors on the surgical floor. I finally had my first moment on the floor by myself. My heart was racing. I had questions running through my head, questions I still had about procedures, “what if’s,” really tough questions I imagined each patient asking me. I tried to think of how I would answer all the questions that would come my way in a 15 minute conversation with someone recovering from surgery. The next hour was a blur. I introduced myself at the nurse’s station and immediately sensed their busyness, stress, rush. I slipped away from the nurse’s station to the first room on my list. I froze at the door and waited, waited for something. I was nervous and anxious. Finally, I took a deep breath, and using all my strength, I tried to fly.

I walked into the room and after introducing myself, discovered the patient was asleep. I didn’t swoop in to “help” someone like I was expecting. The other visits were stranger. I didn’t sit. I prayed awkwardly, I talked more than I listened. I returned to the Chaplain office exhausted from the unrealistic expectations I had for myself. Those expectations distracted me from connecting with patients and being present with them.

I discovered something new. I listened to myself. I moved from awkward Jeffrey to compassionate Jeffrey. I tried again. I sat next to patients, listened more than I talked, prayed using language that felt grounded to God, and left each patient with questions to reflect on. I grew. I may not have soared, but I made it back to the nest for another try.

Prayer: God, give me the courage to leave the nest, so I can learn to soar. Amen.

Genesis 2: 1-3

## **SABBATH**

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that [God] had done, and [God] rested on the seventh day from all the work that [God] had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that [God] had done in creation”

What is Sabbath? Many of the ministers I am friends with who have taken sabbaticals use the time for self-care, yet they also work extra hard in their time off to be productive and have something to show for it. Many ministers write blogs to keep their parishioners up to date on everything that is happening. Some write books, or go to foreign countries for research. But what is real Sabbath? And how do I approach Sabbath keeping?

Sabbath is about connection to God, and listening to the self. Genesis 2:1-3 sings of God’s Sabbath taking. Perhaps God is teaching me about Sabbath in the scriptures.

What does rest look like for me today? I find rest in being with my family, in spending time conversing with my loved ones. It means taking time to heal from loss and grief. Resting to me is repairing and

healing old relationships, and finding space to just “be” with those I love. This even means being with myself. Rest is listening to God’s invitation: Peace be still, and know that I am God.

What does blessing look like for me today? I feel blessed to be a part of a Church that supports me and lets me take time and space to heal and seek wholeness. Blessing is a way of relationship whereby those I trust and love are those who trust and love me back. What does hallowed-ness look like for me today? Life is hallowed. It is sacred. And the way I honor God’s work to create this web of life is to celebrate my life. It is to ritualize around the table and in the park and at the grocery store. It is to ritualize moments such as these. In the Christian tradition we worship as part of our Sabbath keeping, and I believe that love, respect, and relationship must become the shape of my worship of God today.

Prayer: God, when I am exhausted, let me take Sabbath seriously. Seriously enough to play and laugh and sing myself into wholeness. Amen.

Proverbs 16: 9

### **CHANGE OF PLANS**

“The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps.”

In the autumn after Ainslie was born, Ashley and I decided to go to a chili festival in Pueblo, Colorado. We had plans and did our best to gather everything we needed to drive an hour with a small infant, and have extra clothes and diapers, and her stroller and baby wrap, and all the other bells and whistles. Leaving for a trip, even a short one for a couple of hours, was a production that surprised us! There was so much to pack and prepare, especially now that we had a small baby. And because we hadn’t done much traveling since she was born, this was a new learning experience, and we were definitely learning by trial and error. While we planned to stay for the entire afternoon in Pueblo, we left after maybe an hour, when it became apparent that Ainslie needed more care and attention than we could provide amidst the crowds and fair setting.

On the way home from Pueblo, Ashley and I talked about the experience, our expectations, and what when well, and not so well. We both had these great expectations for the experience we wanted to have with Ainslie, but things didn’t go as planned. We talked about how do we make the best of the situation, and not feel guilty that we had to leave early, or that we choose caring for our child over hanging out at a party or going out to have fun around town. Wouldn't it have been much better to just hang out in our back yard on a Saturday and not get stressed out by packing and traveling and then leaving early? But maybe we needed this experience, so that we could learn and grow into other experiences. Maybe we can, and have learned from this, and now we'll be better prepared and more realistic about our next trip. Confidence creates competence, and competence creates confidence. We are better because we experience and reflect on those experiences. I am better. And the more intention I have to reflect and process my own feelings about an experience, the more present I am with myself, and with my family.

Prayer: God, when I need to change my plans, help me be forgiving and loving, especially with myself. Let me grow experientially, exponentially. Amen.

## ASHLEY DODSON (MDIV '14) GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO

Lent 2019  
Isaiah 42: 16

### NAVIGATING

“I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them.”

Packing the last box, we left our keys on the kitchen sink. We were moving to Vermont for our first real “adult” jobs, and saying good-bye to our home of the last few years. Our egos were brimming with success—we had jobs and were leaving Chicago before graduating seminary. We had made it. We left later than we planned, which meant rush hour traffic. We got stuck. For hours. We were supposed to have a “huzzah moment,” waving goodbye to Chicago—but the Bears had lost the day before, Chicago was grumpy and didn’t care we were starting new jobs and leaving town. Okay. Fine. We knew how to survive Chicago traffic: coffee, NPR, each other, and an iPhone to navigate around the traffic.

The iPhone map led us out of Chicago (finally!) and we drove for a million miles across the open land. We arrived to our new home, with people waiting to help unpack our moving truck. But before the truck door was opened, we were handed a stack of paper maps. “Welcome to Vermont!” We laughed. We were from the big city and had iPhones, digital maps—we had no need for such an archaic art form. Thanks, but no thanks. We had our trusty phones and we would be okay.

Fast-forward a few months. Little did we know, Vermont lacked cell phone reception. Everywhere. But whatever, we had the day off and thought we would go on a little adventure for the afternoon. We of course opened our map app on the phone and started navigating our adventure. We drove through the beautiful countryside, and then found a short cut home. This road was gorgeous. It was winding, had beautiful old trees, and followed a stream. We drove for several miles, took a corner, and then suddenly, out of nowhere, the road stopped. There was no longer any road in front of us. Just a huge pile of snow. Our trusty map app that clearly showed a short-cut that would have chopped off several minutes of travel time, now could not load the map. No reception. A dead end. The map and the road disagreed. We got out of the car and looked around. Perhaps the snow pile wasn’t as big as we thought. Perhaps we just missed a small bend in the road. No, nothing. We were lost, and stuck in the middle of Vermont. We should have put those maps in our car showing this road was closed in winter. We

should have worn snow boots. We should have stayed on the known path. Okay. Fine. We had survived Chicago traffic. How hard could Vermont be? We got back in the car and assessed our situation: we had coffee, NPR, each other, and an iPhone (no reception) to navigate the impassable road. We laughed.

Prayer: God, whether I take the long road, or the short-cut, give me company to laugh with as I find my way back home. Amen.



## VIRGINIA GILBERT, MST '16 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Lent 2019  
Philippians 4:1

### **STAND FIRM IN THE LORD**

Therefore, my brothers and sisters whom I love and miss, who are my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord. (Common English Bible)

In this time of Lent when we are facing our shortcomings and seeking repentance, it's good to follow Paul's advice that begins "stand firm in the Lord" to its completion, in the following verses of his letter.

We feel buffeted and jostled, sometimes knocked over and flattened, by events, by oppositions, by circumstances. They can be life-threatening or just annoying. And on top of that, we are affected by people who do not follow the example of Jesus, even when they say they are. Paul knew about that. It's what preceded his advice that begins chapter 4:

18 As I have told you many times and now say with deep sadness, many people live as enemies of the cross. 19 Their lives end with destruction. Their god is their stomach, and they take pride in their disgrace because their thoughts focus on earthly things. (Phil. 3:18-19 CEB)

I invite you to fill in contemporary examples of "enemies of the cross" from denominational splits, national politics, international conflicts, or with more individual examples from your life or your family. The struggles continue, even as the details change.

After listing all the problems of people whose God is their stomach, Paul concludes his advice about how to stand firm with verses 4:8-9.

8 if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise. 9 Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us. The God of peace will be with you.

Three days a week, I take care of my nearly 6-month-old granddaughter. Those days are a blur of filling and warming bottles, changing diapers and (most of the time) holding her to feed her or to get her to fall asleep or at least rest. She complains when I try to lay her down for a nap or put her on the floor to play. She wants to sleep or play on me.

And so I stand firm in the Lord and hold her, often leaning back in my recliner and letting her sit in my lap or lie on my chest. I find many things that are true and holy and just and pure and lovely and worthy of praise in feeling the rise and fall of her relaxed breathing or watching her intense study of her fingers, or listening to her lilting babbling. My focus changes from those vexing news clips or troubling bureaucratic glitches or mean Facebook posts. And I realize how basic God's gifts are.

May the God of peace be with you also.

## JOSHUA HUNDL, MDIV STUDENT CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Lent 2019

### **A REFLECTION ON LENT**

I think I did soda one year, cliché as that may be. I know for sure I've done chocolate; I snuck like one M&M and felt terrible. Social media, I did twice – I guess I didn't do it well enough the first time? I don't remember my reasoning. But every year growing up, I picked something new to sacrifice for Lent. Or rather, I picked something additional to sacrifice: I was already giving up my attraction to men.

I was told, as were the people around me, that by sacrificing something, we were demonstrating our devotion to God. And so we sacrificed – not just during Lent, but as often as we could. We sacrificed years of Sunday mornings, showing up early to set up chairs. We sacrificed masses of paychecks, contributing to the new building campaign. Those who sacrificed were identified, and were asked to sacrifice even more. We were asked to sacrifice a position in leadership because a man deserved it more. We were asked to sacrifice companionship because we didn't fall in love with who we were supposed to.

I haven't observed Lent in the traditional sense for many years now. I'm suspicious of prioritizing self-sacrifice when so many of us have given so much and received so disproportionately little in return.

Lent serves as a preparation for Easter, a day when we celebrate resurrection, when we revel in the promise of new life. For those who have let so many parts of themselves be destroyed on a mispurposed altar, the process of restoration requires embracing what we've given away. I wonder if Lent can be observed with a season of holy indulgence. I wonder if resurrection looks like 40 days of rejoicing defiantly in the face of shame and fear. I wonder if we can take everything we believed marked us for death and say, "No, this is what makes me come alive."

## RICHARD MCKINNEY, MA '15 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Lent 2019

### **FORGIVENESS**

This Lenten season, I'm offering forgiveness.  
To myself.

To my past self that thought I would never be good enough.  
To my present self that still thinks that sometimes.  
To my future self for judging my past self.

I am offering forgiveness to the parts of me that I have not reached in so long.  
That hidden away piece that I've long since forgotten.  
The one who remembers what it was like to clap when a train arrived in the station,  
Or cried at how beautiful a sunflower was.  
I offer them forgiveness for going away.

I am offering forgiveness to any part of me that has not outlived the darkness,  
Because the light sometimes just isn't bright enough.  
It's not your fault the dimmer switch turned down.

I am offering forgiveness to my eyes that see how beautiful everyone is, but is unable to  
accurately see that in the mirror.

I am offering forgiveness to my mouth for the things it once said.  
That I was nothing.

I am offering forgiveness to myself because I must.  
If I am ever to believe that we are all created equal under the image of god, then I must forgive  
myself the way I forgive others.

My trespasses against myself are wounds that go unlicked and fester and boil.  
I offer forgiveness to myself so that I can give myself this day.

I say to myself, "I want to forgive you."  
Myself responds, "I've been waiting for this my entire life."

This Lenten season, I will strive to forgive myself.