



**“LIVING IN CATASTROPHE”**  
**SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 58:1-5**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**Sunday, September 28, 2025**  
The Rev. Dr. Marcia Whitney Mount Shoop, Pastor

Third Isaiah—not clear historical markers

**(use Kyrie intermittently as marked)**

56-66– could be post-exilic –when some who had been deported, returned and the temple was rebuilt.

There is a fair amount of scholarly uncertainty about dating and historical context.

This section of Isaiah is really about rebuilding not simply a temple, but a culture of piety and accountability.

**Isaiah 58: 1-5**

Shout out; do not hold back!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!

Announce to my people their rebellion,  
to the house of Jacob their sins.

Third Isaiah makes it clear that ethnicity or sexuality or nationality are not what God uses to sort people. There is an inclusive quality to the way God is calling people who had been very tied to place/nation and identity. He’s asking them to shift, to stop sorting based on those things—and to understand that the human family finds health and healing in practices and behaviors, not in accidents of birth.

The God of Third Isaiah, however, is not an anything goes kind of God. This passage is the beginning of a rebuke of religious piety that is performative or divorced from economic justice (we are going slow through this part of Isaiah—so more on the following verses the next few weeks).

2 Yet 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 want God on their side.  
3 “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.  
4 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.

### Sing Kyrie

The human family is not healed by clustering around nation or ethnic identity, but by coming together around shared values and practices that disrupt oppression, that put God at the center of the way we understand power, that do not divide, but that make space for the grief that comes from humanity’s broken trust with each other and with God.

This speaks poignantly into our historical moment—when bodies are being sorted and violated based on identity, based on abuse of power, based on false information and a loss of kinship, and with a bunch of smoke screens about the real problems that we are facing as human beings—that are driven by the structures and systems of our economy.

It’s been a risk for millennia to question the economy—to push up against the economic patterns that are conducive to the concentration of wealth among the few.

We never get a chance to grieve how this strategy of greed has ruptured us as the human family. We never get a chance to mourn how much we have lost together because of this delusion we’ve been living in around false superiority and consumption.

5 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?

### Sing Kyrie

God's rebuke is the most humanizing thing that could happen to a people in the process of rebuilding.

When we have the chance to rebuild, but we avoid hearing and heeding the rebuke of the God who created us for right relationship, we will keep building things that keep us sick and divided from each other.

That's the most sobering thing about our country right now—the unwillingness to hear the rebuke, the erasure of history, the refusal to cultivate a shared narrative around our collective disease.

Third Isaiah says, the problem is not the eunuchs and the foreigners, the problem is your oppressive systems and your unfair wages, the problem is not sexuality and immigration, your problem is the idol you have made of wealth, of political power, of superiority.

### Sing Kyrie

The rebuke should result in grief, in a sobering realization of our delusion, the harm we've done to ourselves and others, the mourning of what we've lost—the ways we have trivialized the life we've been given to share.

Hurricane Helene anniversary—we can't rebuild something that was faulty—even evil in the way it deprives us of our shared humanity.

If we're going to build something new together, we have to sit with the grief of how much what we've been living in hurts and trivializes and dehumanizes us.

If we're going to build something new together, we have to make our lives available to the truth that holds us to account for the ways we lost our way—even if the ways we lost our way were what we had to do to survive.

### Sing Kyrie

This rebuke is really not about shame, it is about creating the conditions for real and lasting change in what we believe is possible as human beings.

Without grief we can't learn to dream again. Without naming our regrets we can't know what we yearn for together.

Without humility we can't hear the heart's desire of the people around us long enough to feel the resonance we share.

The unveiling of apocalypse includes many mirrors for us to see ourselves in—including the mirror of lament, of grief, of sorrow, of regret, of humble repentance. When we believe we are beloved, we can find the courage to be honest about the ways we sometimes lose our way or do harm or center distorted values just to survive.

### Sing Kyrie

When we believe we are beloved we know that this truth telling comes from love. God sees what's possible for us—and so wants us to see that reflected back to us when we look in the mirror.

What fast will we choose in the time of catastrophe, Grace Covenant?

Will we get distracted by performative fasting that doesn't really change the oppressive systems that grip our social arrangements?

Or are we willing to let the catastrophe we are living through humble us to the true sorrow we all carry when the human family is torn apart.

This nation has never grieved properly that it was formed and forged in greed.

This nation has never humbled ourselves collectively so that we could turn around and repent from the ways our economy is built on the backs of people it was never meant to serve.

This nation has never been honest about the way we sold out to the God of consumption and production, the God with pallid skin and a bad temper toward anyone who gets out of line, the church of gilded altars and excessive wealth, the piety that got melded with nationalism, misogyny, and scarcity scare tactics.

Being able to grieve what we've lost is a way to cultivate the healing opportunity that this apocalypse has to offer us. It's our best chance to take this catastrophe that looks like our worst, last dead end, and see how God is making it a pathway to a world that delights in God's creation finally healed.

Thanks be to God.