

THIS FAST I CHOOSE

- *by Karri Munn-Venn*

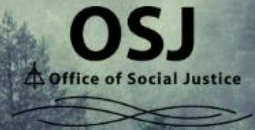


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This Fast I Choose

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May God bless the words of my mouth and
the meditations of all our hearts.

Fasting is not my strong suit.

I have done it occasionally, but not at all gracefully.

I really enjoy good food

and I've been known, on occasion, to get a little "hangry"

– you know, hungry-angry

if I haven't properly fueled my body.

For many years, however, I have given something up for Lent.

But now, as I reflect on what I've given up,

only three things come to mind: chocolate, sugar, coffee.

While not particularly profound, I think my choices are pretty standard fare,
along with alcohol, maybe smoking, and more recently, taking space
from social media.

As we approached Lent this year,

I found myself reflecting on the purpose of it all.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus regularly went out into the wilderness.

There, he would fast and he would pray.

He would open his mind to God's wisdom and direction.

The early church looked to Jesus' example and developed a practice of fasting during the 40 days leading up to Easter.

This practice has evolved over the years
and many Christians now mark Lent by "giving up" a bad habit or
distracting practice.

This symbolic sacrifice is meant to provide space to reflect and refocus,
tune-in to our Christian calling, and renew our commitment to God.

But when we give up chocolate or coffee or social media, does it really serve to strengthen our faith or
our connection to God?

For me, the answer is a clear "no."

If I'm really honest,
I've treated God more like an accountability partner at the gym,
someone who makes sure I show up when my resolve is weak,
rather than our magnificent Creator.

Sure, I've been glad to have established some good new habits,
and it is possible that I'm a moderately healthier person as a result.

But I really don't think that's the point.

Last year, I turned the idea on its head and rather than giving something up,
I committed to bring more beauty into my life.

This was a much more significant exercise than earlier efforts to give
something up.

I slowed down, drew more pictures,
and coloured regularly with my daughter.

Somehow I feel that that practice got a little closer to how Jesus' example suggests we approach this
fast.

I created space outside of the constant motion,
the unrelenting mental chatter, to be present in God's world.

By slowing down, I was better able to listen to my kids, my husband,
and my friends.

I think that maybe I was also able to be just a little more open to
the spirit of God in my life.

And that was a good start.

This year, I wanted to take it a step further.

I wanted to do something that was about more than just me.

I wanted to do something of consequence
that would draw me into closer relationship with God and God's creation.

So, I've committed to **Give it up for the Earth!** I've signed my pledge [CARD]
to eliminate meat from my diet at least one day each week,
stay close to home during March break to avoid aviation emissions, and give my kids a
refresher on the municipal recycling program.

I'm also going to try to buy more food in bulk, in reusable containers,
to reduce the amount of packaging, especially plastic,
that I bring into our home.

Most importantly, however, I am joining my voice to the thousands of
Canadian Christians who are calling on the federal government
to make policy changes that will move us further and faster
towards the Paris climate change goals.

You may have heard about Prime Minister Trudeau's triumphant declaration
that "Canada is back!" when he arrived in Paris
for the international climate change negotiations just weeks after
the 2015 federal election.

Or about Ottawa MP and federal environment minister, Catherine McKenna
at the same meeting, pressing the international community to increase
its level of ambition in addressing the global climate crisis.

Or finally, you might be familiar with the new federal-provincial framework
for climate action that was announced in December.

All good news, to be sure.

But it isn't enough.

The new climate framework is only a starting point for serious
climate action.

It could have been so much more, except that it is built on a vastly

inadequate emissions reduction target. What the federal government had signaled as insufficient now serves as its highest aspiration.

You might be asking,

“hasn't the government claimed that its new plan is consistent with its ‘Paris commitment’?”

Yes, and here's the rub.

The Paris Agreement, ratified by the House of Commons in October, seeks to "strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change ... [by] holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels".

Canada's Paris commitment, however, the emissions-reduction goal the government has set for itself, affirms the same target it inherited from the Conservatives: to reduce GHG emissions 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.

Even modest estimates suggest that the minimum required by the Paris Agreement would see Canada aligning with the international scientific community's recommended reductions of 25-40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020.

Canada's current target translates to only about 14 per cent below 1990 levels by 2030.

Canada's Paris commitment, therefore, is fundamentally incompatible with the Paris Agreement.

It does not represent Canada's fair share in the global effort to reduce emissions.

Put simply, it is an unacceptably unambitious baseline.

This morning we read the beautifully poetic words of Psalm 8:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

*what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?*

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;

*you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

I believe that as Christians God calls us to love and care for all of creation.

I am **Giving it up for the Earth!** as an expression of gratitude to God for the beauty and wonder of creation.

I am **Giving it up for the Earth!** in solidarity with Indigenous peoples in Canada and marginalized people around the world.

I am **Giving it up for the Earth!** in hope for a better future for my children and all children, each one created in God's image.

It might feel like we're being asked to take on the weight of the world.
But it doesn't need to.

I read recently that,

"Chief among obstacles to [taking action] is the mistaken belief that anyone who takes a committed public stand, or least an effective one, has to be a larger-than-life figure – someone with more time, energy, courage, vision, or knowledge than a normal person could ever possess.

But Wendell Berry reminds us, we don't have to be saints.

Specifically, he says,

'We can make ourselves whole only by accepting our partiality, by living within our limits, by being human – not by trying to be gods.'

It is interesting then to reflect on the words of Isaiah 58.

The prophet questions the faithful's motivation for fasting, disclosing that for some it was done to be seen and to "serve [their] own interests" (v.3).

He encourages instead a different sort of fast:

"to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke."

This Lent, *this* is the fast I choose.

Amen.

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