

“God’s Hands are in the Mud”
Genesis 2:1-7; Isaiah 58:1-2
Pastor Brent McDougal

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” — Frederick Buechner

1. At creation, God’s hands were in the mud, in the mess of humanity.

“Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:1-7, NIV).

2. In waiting for the Messiah, the prophets said that faithfulness was found in serving the deepest hurts of humanity.

“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.

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...

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?

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?

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?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

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, 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.

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.

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.” (Isaiah 58:1-12, NIV)

3. With Jesus, we see the human face of the Living God

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means God with us)’” (Matt. 1:21-23, NIV).

5 Practices for Incarnational Mission (or: how to get *your* hands in the mud)

1. The practice of *presence*
2. The practice of *proximity*
3. The practice of *powerlessness*
4. The practice of *prevenience*
5. The practice of *proclamation*
6. The practice of *passion*