

February 26, 2023
First Sunday of Lent

Meditation: "The Body of Jesus"

Forty-five year old Hakam Yasinoglu spent 278 hours buried in the rubble of a collapsed building in Turkey before he was pulled out, alive. 278 hours. That's a little over eleven and a half days. It made me wonder how long someone could survive without water. Thank you Dr. Google. On average, a person can only survive about three days, or 72 hours, without any water. So, Hakam had to have had some source of liquid. Maybe it was rain water, or water from a ruptured pipe, or a puddle, or condensation. Whatever it was, he needed water to stay alive that long. But what about food? Again, Dr. Google to the rescue. On average, a person can survive about a month without food, provided they have water, and air. Oh, and just in case you wondered, on average you can only survive about three minutes without air.

I started wondering, if you could survive for about a month without food, what toll would it take on your body? What happens when you are deprived of food? For starters, your body starts to break down its own tissue for energy, which leads to drastic weight loss and, eventually, to organ failure. Your brain takes about twenty percent of the energy you consume, so without food, you wind up with confusion, brain fog, even hallucinations. Without food, your heart can't pump effectively, so you end up with low blood pressure, which can eventually lead to heart failure. Without food, your blood sugar levels drop. Without food, your belly gets bloated, you get nausea, vomiting, constipation – because your bowels can't push waste along, and you can even end up with pancreatitis – inflammation and swelling of the pancreas. Other things that happen include hair loss, dry skin, hypothermia, weak bones, and, for women, menstrual cessation.

After eleven and a half days, Hakam was probably too weak to stand or walk without assistance, and would have likely been dehydrated as well. Little wonder that he was carried away in a basket and taken to hospital for treatment. I remember, as an elementary school student, taking part in a thirty hour fast. I remember how hungry and light headed and weak I felt at the end, and I was allowed juice. I can't imagine 278 hours.

It's Lent again. That season of forty days that leads up to Easter, the Resurrection of the crucified Jesus. Often we focus so much on the divinity of the risen Christ that we forget about the humanity of Jesus. This Lent, I thought I'd like to consider the human, Jesus.

There in the Judean wilderness he fasted forty days and forty nights, or about 960 hours. That's more than three times as long as Hakam was trapped in the rubble, and he barely survived. That's even at the outer limits of how long it is humanly possible to stay alive without food. I can't imagine how physically weak Jesus would have been. How did he manage to survive cold desert nights? What hallucinations did he experience, or was his visit from Satan, the deceiver, an hallucination? If the visitation was real, and not imagined, how was he clear headed enough to reply cogently?

So how did Hakam survive? In a word, focus. Hakam had a goal to focus on, to be reunited with his family. He focused on that goal, and it gave him the inner strength he needed to cling to life.... until angels came and waited on him.

How had Jesus survived more than three times as long? Same way. He had something to focus on, only, for Jesus, his focus was on God..... until angels, literally messengers from God, came and waited on him.

“Interesting, but what does it have to do with us,” you ask?

What is it we are starved of? Human compassion? Respect for others? (bipoc, homeless, sex worker, addict, people whose gender identity or sexual orientation is different than our own) Tolerance? Patience? Love? (If we have gifts, skills, wealth, wisdom, faith, and do not have love – we are nothing)

Who are the angels who wait on us? Aid workers, like the ones who rescued and subsequently treated Hakam? Mental health professionals? Friends? Family? Our church family? The Risen Christ?

When we are struggling, what should we focus on? Family? The kingdom of God?

As we go from this place today, as we walk the Lenten road that leads to Good Friday's cross and Easter morning's resurrection, focus on what this world could be like if God were in charge and not us.