

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2026
SERMON: "THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY EVENT OF 2026"
REV. IRENE WILLIS HASSAN
SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 4:1-11

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4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"^[b]

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Sermon: The Global Community Event of 2026

Welcome to Pastor Irene's Annual Diatribe on Fasting.

Fasting is spiritually important to me. I preached a couple years ago about the Muslim practice of Ramadan, and how a significant chunk of the world's population participates in an extremely intensive fast together that includes no water, no food, no talk stink, no music, no smoking, and no sex during daylight hours for 30 days. It was a privilege to live in a Muslim-majority country and watch the closeness that this communal fast brought to the people around me, and inspired me to continue practicing Ramadan and the Christian fast that we've now entered called "Lent" with purposefulness.

Lent represents the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert fasting and being tempted by Satan, as reflected here in Matthew 4. It's meant to be a time of spiritual reflection and discipline. We fast in order to remember those who are hungry and do not have access to clean food and water, and we fast to clear our minds of the worldly comforts so that we're standing in a clear space with God in order to hear Him better.

An oddity has occurred this year in that the Islamic fast, Ramadan, has also started on February 18, which was Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent for Christians. So for the next month, Muslims and Christians worldwide will be intentionally and purposefully limiting our worldly comforts together in an effort to hear God more clearly. In the 14 years that I've been practicing Ramadan, this is the first time both fasts have started at the same time (which is lucky for me – I don't have to fast twice!)

I feel this dual fast of the world's two largest religions is an opportunity. Muslims represent 2 billion people worldwide, or about a quarter of the world's population. Christians represent about 3 billion people worldwide, or about a third of the world's population. Together, we make up a majority of the world's spiritual identification. Imagining all those people fasting together and spending an intentional month of listening to God, when we look at the sheer numbers of people involved in this worldwide fasting project, is truly remarkable.

It's particularly remarkable in the United States because of how divided we are all feeling as a country and a culture right now. It seems that such an opportunity to come together, especially with those who are different from us, is significant and timely.

Now, usually during this Diatribe on Fasting I beat over your heads the important of individual fasting, whether that's the sun up to sundown intense purging of everything like we practice in our family, or something more moderate that makes sense for your health and life situation, like refraining from chocolate or television. I'm not sure how many of you have actually been inspired by this yearly pep talk on fasting to actually adjust your habits for the 40 days of Lent, but I do want to mention that I hope you do!

However, this year, my prayer is that we remember how very, very many of us worldwide have entered a fast on February 18. Technically, *5 billion people are fasting*. 5 billion people are making intentional decisions to let go of worldly pleasures to learn more about God. 5 billion people are waking up each morning seeking greater spiritual clarity in their lives.

The reason this is significant is because when we try to hold the burden of all the pain and sadness in our lives and our world by ourselves, it feels overwhelming. Yet, knowing that you're doing something in unity with not just millions, but billions of other people, can give us the inspiration and strength we need to not give up.

Fasting in 2026 is indeed not a private practice, but a Global Community Event. So, what if we approached our fast as a global community? What if every person who is observing a time of closeness to God and intentional resistance of temptation also committed to building a more merciful world? What if this wasn't only about private holiness, but public goodness?

When billions of people fast at the same time, that is not just a spiritual statistic. It is a community event on a global scale. It is a reminder that human beings, across cultures and languages and political divides, are capable of restraint. We are capable of self-examination. We are capable of saying, "There is something more important than my immediate comfort."

That is powerful, because the same discipline that helps you say no to chocolate can help you say no to cruelty. The same pause before eating can become a pause before speaking. The same intentional hunger can become intentional generosity.

If five billion people are already practicing restraint, reflection, and prayer, what if we turned that energy outward?

Here are some practical ways we can do that together:

Let your fasting create generosity. If you are spending less on food, coffee, entertainment, or impulse purchases, set that money aside. As a family, decide where it will go. Support a local food pantry. Contribute to clean water efforts. Help a neighbor quietly and anonymously. Let your hunger feed someone else.

Or, fast from division. In a country that feels perpetually outraged, what if we fasted from contempt? What if for 40 days we refused to mock, belittle, or dehumanize people we disagree with? What if we practiced curiosity instead of caricature? That kind of fast could change entire communities.

And finally and importantly – because we are a community that is committed to holding each other spiritually – let's fast as a church. Not just individually, but communally. Share what you are learning. Encourage one another when it's hard. Hold each other accountable to becoming softer, kinder, braver people. The early church practiced spiritual disciplines together because transformation is more sustainable in community than in isolation.

Here's the truth: fasting is not impressive to God if it doesn't make us more loving. The prophets made that clear. A fast that ends at sunset but leaves injustice untouched has missed the point. A Lent that changes our diet but not our hearts has missed the point.

We cannot solve every global crisis in 40 days. But we can practice being the kind of people who would.

And when billions of people are practicing humility at the same time—Muslim, Christian, and many others seeking God in their own ways—that is a rare and sacred moment. It is a reminder that we are more united in our longing than we are divided in our differences.

So this year, as you fast, remember: you are participating in something vast. You are standing in solidarity with a significant portion of humanity. Let that embolden you. Let it soften you. Let it move you toward others, not away from them.

May this season form us into a community that hungers not only for food, but for justice. Not only for clarity, but for compassion. Not only for personal growth, but for a better world—together.

Amen.

Discuss: How might your personal fast this season move beyond private discipline and become a concrete act of unity, generosity, or bridge-building in your community?