

So prepare yourselves for a deeply nerdy reference. I'm guessing that many of you like us, have absolutely full scale dove into *The Mandalorian*. Even if you haven't, you probably have seen the Baby Yoda memes and the random comments from seemingly everyone about this show and everything that comes with it. Not to get bogged down in details the general gist is this is a show set in the Star Wars universe, following a Mandalorian, a very specific kind of bounty hunter who comes with his own type of armor, his own special set of skills. If you saw the original Star Wars, then basically imagine an entire show based around Boba Fett and you're set.

So one of the things that characterizes this particular Mandalorian is that he was raised within a specific sect of his people. He grew up learning that he was never take his helmet off, that there were certain things he had to say or do in order to fully be a *mandalorian*. You see this come out quite quickly in the show by his kind of catchphrase. Any time he does something that seems out of sync with the rest of the world or any time he makes a decision that no one else would make, he falls back on the same four words, "This is the way." This is his code, this is what he was raised to be, he doesn't know how to do anything different. His moral code, his decision making skills, his choices, his very way of carrying himself all come down to that one thing, this was what he was taught, there is no other choice, no

other option, “this is the way.” It’s just who he is and how he has to behave, to do anything else would be incomprehensible to him.

For so long, God has thought that God has laid out a way for God’s people, a tried and true path for them to follow, a guiding light for their lives. Their lives in relationship with God, their lives in relationship with each other. God thought the way was clear, it made sense, it was right there for them to walk. But somewhere along the way, the people of Israel have gotten really confused and in their confusion they have not only dug their heels in to what they think is right, but they’ve also gotten really, really ticked off at God. They don’t get it. They think they’ve been doing the right thing, checking all the boxes, making all the right decisions, and yet somehow God seems to be absent and they’ve hit a point where they’re demanding that God show up or their going to just sit in the corner and pout.

To them, *this is the way*, they go to worship, they fast, they acknowledge the Sabbath, they’re doing all the right things, so how dare God seem distant? How dare God seem to pull back from them? They throw up their hands and declare we have done *all of this*, humbled ourselves, fasted to the point where we can’t take it anymore, and you don’t seem to care!! You showed us the way and we followed it and it doesn’t seem to be enough. How can you not see us? How can you not

acknowledge what we've been doing?! *This is the way*. We're doing what we're supposed to, now it's your turn to show up and do what *you're* supposed to because we can't do this all on our own.

And here comes God. What you're doing? This isn't the way. This isn't even *close* to the way that I laid out for you. Worship for the sake of saying you went to worship, checked off that box for the week? That's not the way. Fasting and observing the Sabbath and making it all about you, drawing attention to yourself? That's not the way. Using the day you take off out of reverence for me as an excuse to treat your workers horribly and oppress them? That is certainly not the way. I'm not looking for your faith, for your worship to be a check the box exercise. You want to know the way? The way I gave you was about freeing your neighbor from the bonds of injustice, not perpetrating more of it. The way I gave you was about feeding the hungry, not hoarding it all up for yourselves. The way that I gave you was about clothing the naked and providing shelter for the homeless, not turning a blind eye and looking the other way because its uncomfortable to do anything else. The way I gave you was about being a light in the darkness for your siblings, not about shining that light solely upon yourself and saying how amazing you are.

You want me to show up? Show up for each other. Be there for one another. Loose the bonds of oppression amongst you, seek justice, give abundantly, heal the afflicted and do whatever you can to ease their burdens. Stop focusing on all of your anger and your angst, proclaiming that your way is the way I set for you. The way that you're on, that is the way you defined, based on what you wanted to do, what you thought was easiest and best to get by. That is not the way. I don't deny that my way is difficult and tugs you where you might not want to go, but I'm not interested in false piety. I'm interested in genuine care for neighbors, in justice, in righteousness, in a faith that is lived out not just given lip service.

Today, we acknowledge that in all of our human brokenness we so easily fall into the same trap as the people of Israel. We come up with our checklist of "faith stuff" that we're comfortable with, that's easy, and we say, look at me, I'm living my best faith life, doing what God wants, this list? This is the way. All the while we ignore the hungry, the oppressed, the lost amongst us. All the while we have no interest in justice, in creating the kingdom of God on earth. The only thing we have an interest in is ourselves, and that is just not the way.

Lent is our opportunity to find a new way, or better put to get back to God's way. It's about deep examination of who we are and how we've been

connecting to God and one another and looking to see where we have strayed for who God has called us to be. Lent isn't about saying *look at me, look at all the stuff I'm giving up*. It's about sitting with God and saying, look at my heart, here's where I want to get better, here's where I want to reconnect, here's where I have let my light dim and it needs to shine forth. And don't get me wrong, give up the things you want to give up, I know I am, but let that process also be about connection, about drawing you closer to God, about examining what parts of God's way you've given up and need to rediscover.

At one point in *The Mandalorian*, he meets mandalorians who were raised a different way, with a different code, and it rocks him sideways because he realizes that *his* way, isn't the only way, it isn't the thing that defines everyone, it's just been what defines him. We do the same thing. We convince ourselves that our way is God's way, even when deep down we know that it's not. Our way is simply the easiest, most palatable way. Our way tends to be the path of least resistance, not the path of the kingdom. May this Lent be our wake up call to look at God and say, I remember the way. Freedom for the oppressed, hope for the hopeless, healing for the broken, food for the hungry. May this Lent be the time we finally open our hearts to one another and to God and truly say, this is the way. **AMEN!!!**