

**SECOND SCRIPTURE READING: Micah 6:6-8** pg 866 OT

With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? <sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? <sup>8</sup> He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly<sup>[a]</sup> with your God.

**FIRST SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 5:1-12** pg 4 NT

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

<sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

*“Do, Love, Walk”*

“With what shall I come before the Lord?” (*repeat*). It’s perhaps the most important question anyone ever asked. It is the basic, fundamental human question, isn’t it? It was asked by the prophet, Micah, nearly 2750 years ago. In the reading this morning we hear him ask it of the people of Israel, God’s chosen ones. You see, they had forgotten. They’d forgotten the stipulations of the covenant which God had made with them, the promise made with Noah, with Abraham & Sarah, with Moses. They’d begun to compete over the size and quality of their burnt offerings. They were bribing and paying off officials of the synagogue. They were coveting and cheating in their relationships with each other, not caring for the widows, orphans, and strangers in the land. They’d forgotten. They forgotten what living out God’s way looks like. They’d forgotten what obedience means. By definition, and by their own doing, they were losing their blessed position as God’s treasured possessions. Soon they would cease to be the nation which could bless other nations.

Just prior to where we began reading today, Micah describes God putting Israel on the witness stand, as the Accused. A list of God’s gracious and generous acts towards Israel over long generations is presented, not the least of which was freeing them from slavery. Then, Israel, recognizing its guilt in forgetting God, asks, “*What shall I bring before the Lord?*” In other words, “*What can I do to be right with God?*” “*Shall I simply bow, and offer reverence?*” “*Or is it a sacrifice that will make things right between us...1000 rams, 10,000 rivers of oil, maybe I should offer my firstborn child?*” (just fyi: human sacrifice was not allowed in the Israelite culture, so Israel here is making a statement of utter sincerity). Then, then Israel remembers. Israel remembers that what God wants for them is to live lives of integrity, to have character, and godly behavior...to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. These are not requests, but imperatives because they result in lives which are real, full-to-overflowing, brimming-with-vitality and which ultimately make the world a better place.

It is a consistent Biblical motif, this call to integrity, the imperative to walk the talk. Amos, another OT mouthpiece for God, says, “*I hate, I despise your festivals, your solemn assemblies,*

*your burnt offerings, your songs. Let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever flowing stream*". Jesus tells the rich, young ruler seeking eternal life that he needs to sell all that he has and give it to the poor. And in his sermon on the mount, Jesus's beatitudes are all about these things. Listen to a couple of them once again: "*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Do Justice),*" he says. "*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. (Love kindness)*" "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Walk humbly)*".

Yes, it's a consistent theme throughout Scripture. Lives which are not accompanied by doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly are NOT the abundant, full lives God desires. Indeed, they become hypocritical and irrelevant when lived by God's people. *(pause)* You know, it's not uncommon for people these days, who have been away from church for a long time, to explain that they are taking the brave step to come back because they want authenticity. Maybe you know some people like this. Maybe this is you. They have not found meaning in money, status, titles, or power. Their lives feel empty and frustrated. They seek a faith makes a difference in the lives of others. *(pause)*

So....justice...We're to do it! That's Nike's famous marketing slogan, right? Just do it. It's not simply fair play we're talking about here. This "doing justice" is having a deeply determined compassion for the poor, the sick, the voiceless, the marginalized, the invisible. It's having the spiritual maturity to acknowledge and use the privileges we've been given and then becoming actively engaged in correcting the systemic problems that create inequity. The privileges that we need acknowledge are due, of course, to the fact that we've happened to have been born where we've been born or happened to have ended up where we've ended up with families, teachers and social networks behind us that have taught us values and discipline, given us aspiration and hope, and provided freedom and opportunity. We have, by no merit of our own been given them. Yet so many others have not. So many others have never been given a glimpse of them, not from their first breath. And these people are consequently vulnerable to

oppression, abuse, poverty, and disregard. Acting justly is remembering, what John Killinger calls, the “dark legacy of human injustice,” and working to stop it.<sup>1</sup>

Now this might make some of us nervous. It does me at times. It’s radical. It takes courage and a real effort to step out there. But it’s what God requires of us. It’s how we live out faithfully God’s way, and how we, like the Israelites, live into the title of God’s treasured possessions. *(pause)* But what’s wonderful is that the Church, if functioning as a church should, provides us the vehicle and the support to do it. At this very moment, here at FPC, anyone can engage in putting together hygiene kits for those beat down by disaster, help the homeless and hungry by supporting the CC Soup Kitchen and Cove House, give a child a future by giving to PCHAS and RAINBOW room, and encourage our mission co-workers who are, in turn, helping Zambians learn new farming techniques. We can pay a kid’s way to camp, support the PCUSA offerings, write a senator, march, vote, do....do justice. *(pause)*

Love kindness. The Hebrew word is  $\text{חֶסֶד}$  (Hesed), one of the most frequently used words in the Bible. It’s most often used to describe God’s character...merciful, patient, gentle, ever present, understanding. When we’re told to love kindness, it means to act in a godly way unto others. Whenever and wherever “the Other” is placed on our path, we’re to greet them with a divine-like hospitality and make an effort to understand their position. Here at FPC, we have ministries which are all about Hesed. Here, you can be a companion to the elderly through Prime Time Ministries, help someone who is returning home from the hospital, in transition, or stressed in some way by making them a caring casserole, you can help teach a child about caring for God’s animals, be a shepherd who prays for and supports a brother or sister in the faith. Love kindness...so many ways to do it.

And finally, we are called to walk humbly with God. This is the kind of humility that remembers that God is our Creator and we are the Created, that God is the one and only God, and even the best among us is a lowly sinner. It is this kind of humility that keeps us from

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<sup>1</sup>John Killinger, “On Noticing the Color Purple, As in ‘Purple Mountain’s Majesty,’” In: Pulpit Digest, July/August, 1998, 45-52. (Quoted in Joanna Adams. Sermon: “Purple Mountain Majesties”.[http://morningsidepc.com/archive/s3.amazonaws.com/dfc\\_attachments/public/documents/1200761/1-18-09\\_Purple\\_Mountain\\_Majesties.pdf](http://morningsidepc.com/archive/s3.amazonaws.com/dfc_attachments/public/documents/1200761/1-18-09_Purple_Mountain_Majesties.pdf). (accessed 3/8/2018).

looking down our nose at someone else because we're looking up at God. When we're humble, our own inner chatter is quieted because our ears are attuned to God's direction and our eyes opened to God's truth. Here at FPC, we nourish this humble walk through our worship services, our educational programs and our tender care for God's Creation.

*Several weeks ago, in her great wisdom, Marion Palumbo, shared a little book at a PW meeting. The book is called, "Three Little Words". It is written by Terry Ferguson, a father who'd been looking for a way to pass on his love for God's Word to his daughter. One afternoon, he saw an interview of an old rock and roll star, who said that the advice he'd given his son in life was to "Put God first, Do your best and Just be yourself." Terry was impressed with the simplicity of this and decided to come up with three-word responses which were biblically based, which were reminders of God's truths, and which could be easily remembered.*

Well, you know, it's a great idea, one that God had too. 2750 years ago, God gave 3 simple words to us which are easy to remember. They are the answer to the fundamental question which all people eventually ask, "*With what shall I come before the Lord?*" They are God's requirements for living a life which is authentic, which makes a difference in the lives of others, and which results in being the treasured possessions God intended us to be. "*Do Justice, Love Kindness and Walk Humbly.*" Do, Love, Walk, brothers and sisters. With these we shall come before the Lord. This is it. Let's not forget. Let's do it. Let's just do it....together. Amen.