

Three Ingredients of Faithful Living  
Seattle First Baptist Church  
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Micah 6:6-8

“With what shall I come before the Lord,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before God with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”  
God has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

I have titled this message, Three Ingredients of Faithful Living—to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

The eighth century BCE prophet Micah, penned the existential question that has plagued humankind since the dawn of creation, what does God want from me?

Yes, we are aware that God blesses us because of who we are and in spite of who we are. Mostly, we know that God blesses us just because God can. It certainly has nothing to do with how deserving we are. In our prayer time, we thank God for food, shelter, healing, and for grace and mercy. In our better moments, we ask ourselves, what does God want in return for such abundant gifts of grace. God, you have been so good to me. You have blessed me and my family beyond what I ever imagined. What

can I do to show my gratitude? And the response is, to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

Then, we have our not so good moments when we complain to God by comparing our situation to our neighbor, coworker, or friend. God, Susan has grandchildren and I don't. God, Jason takes more vacations than I do. God, Claire has lost more weight than me. In our not so good moments, we also ask God why. Why did I get sick? Or, why didn't I get my dream job that I applied for? Or, why do I have to deal with all these family issues of arguing, no money, addiction, or lack of child care? And, today in my moments of confusion and disbelief I am asking God, why is this thin-skinned, ego driven, non-reading, name calling, narcissist, living in the White House?

Yet, even when we are angry, disappointed, and overwhelmed we also ask, "**God what do you want from me?**" And, the answer is still the same--to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

In this passage, Micah is responding to God's people feeling that God has asked way too much of them. A few verses before those we read, God asked, "what have I done to weary you?" How many of us have been there? We too have said, God this is just way too much work for me. Surely, you chose the wrong person for this work. Then God recited to Israel those moments when God delivered them from their foes. God asked, don't you remember what I did for you? I delivered you from your enemies. I gave you men and women servant leaders (God even mentioned Miriam by name). God asked, why are you feeling so weary and so tired of me?

When challenges come our way, we tend to forget how God walked with us the last time we had a major challenge. If God brought us through our last storm, God will bring us through the one we are in now.

Since the November election, many African Americans have relied on our ancestral cloud of witnesses to give us courage and wisdom. We have called upon the strength of

our fore-parents who made it through the middle passage and slavery. We have called upon the strength of those who made it through Jim Crow, lynching, and the civil rights era. We remember how we made it through the Reagan era of trickle-down economics that never made it to the hood. We recall how we made it through the Bushes 1,000 points of light while this country built the biggest prison industrial complex in the world and populated it with black and brown people. We have been reminded that the same God who brought our ancestors over a way that with tears has been watered, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered-(as the choir sang two weeks ago) will take us through the next 4 years.

But in challenging times like these, what does God require of us? We know God is able, but what does God want from us? How do we know if we are doing the right things? Well the writer of Micah said God has already told you what is required. We are to act justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

Please note that Micah did not say God wants things. God is not interested in our trinkets nor our sacrifices. God's doesn't want another bottle of anointing oil, or holy water. God is not impressed by our piety or interested in burnt offerings, a barbecue, nor cattle on a thousand hills. God isn't interested nor impressed by our degrees, our houses or cars, not even our bank accounts, or investments. God is interested in how we treat one another and how we walk with God.

So, what does it mean to do justice? It means we are expected to do **something**. It is not enough just to **think** justice thoughts. It is not enough to **wish** for a more just society. It is not enough to **complain** about the lack of justice. God expects us to roll up our sleeves and get busy. We are to work for fairness on behalf of those who are weak and vulnerable.

And, we don't all have to do the same things. There is a plethora of issues that need our justice minded attention today! From oil pipelines and Standing Rock, to oil trains, universal healthcare, women's reproductive rights, global warming, trans rights, gun

violence, homelessness, food insecurity, education reform, affordable college, equal pay for equal work, immigration reform, and on and on and on. There is so much work that needs to be done. This is not the time to be paralyzed by bully rhetoric and unbridled narcissism even when it comes from the president of the United States. The work of justice making is hard relentless work. It is more than a march down 4<sup>th</sup> avenue with 150,000 of your closest friends. So, what does God require of us? First, do justice.

Secondly, God requires that we love kindness. I was taken aback by all the signs and creativity at the Women's March last week in Seattle. One sign that caught my attention simply said, **be kind**. That was it—**be kind**. Wow, it is so sad to think that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we must remind ourselves and others to be kind. One would think that in the greatest country in the world acting kindly is automatic. But it isn't. It feels that rudeness, arrogance, and bigotry are getting the upper hand. We must be kind even when the world is mean to us. Now, I am not saying be a door mat. We can be kind and respectful, while standing our ground and doing the right thing. Michelle Obama said it best, when they go low, we go high.

In Micah, the Hebrew word hesed is translated in English as kindness. Hesed is a beautiful word that means so much more than being nice. It is frequently translated as loving-kindness. To do hesed is make sure others have everything they need without thought of what it might cost us. Hesed means to make sure others live with dignity, grace and mercy. Hesed is generosity, loyalty, faithfulness, and love.

In the book, ***The Color Purple***, Alice Walker's definition of Womanist includes loves the people. God is calling us to genuinely love God's people so much that we act kindly towards others without thinking about what's in it for me. This is not the Art of the Deal. Hesed is not quid pro quo. When we follow God's mandate and offer kindness to another, we may not get anything in return at that moment. But we will have the satisfaction of knowing we did the right thing. To love kindness is to give for giving sake because we love God's people. It is kindness for kindness sake. It is offering hesed or

loving kindness because we have received loving kindness from God. So, the second ingredient of faithful living is to love kindness.

Lastly, the third ingredient of faithful living is to walk humbly with God. Living humbly is realizing that but for the grace of God, life could be one big mess. If your life is already a mess, realize it could be worse. Living humbly does not mean putting oneself down, but living life in a way that honors the **Divine** in you and honors the **Divine** in others.

Walking humbly with God is not going one's own way, but going God's way. That means we must take time to be with God to know what God would have us do. We must guard against our busy schedules, full calendars, and unending to-do lists edging God out of our lives. Our personal time with God must be a priority.

And, walking with God signals movement. If we are stuck doing the same things we have been doing for the last 20 years, perhaps we are not walking with God, but have decided to go it alone and go our own way. There are **congregations** all over this country that have decided to close their doors rather than move forward following the Spirits' lead. They don't want to work that hard or do anything new. It is easier to close the door and turn off the lights. But is that walking humbly with God?

God wants the presence of our company. When life feels unfair, trust God and keep walking with God. When life feel overwhelming, don't abandon God, but keep walking with God. When your heart is broken, remember God is a heart fixer and a mind regulator. Keep walking with God.

What does God require of us? Three things. Just three things. Not two or one, but all three are required--to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

And in the words of our great Pastor Tim. And today, if you hear that voice do not harden your hearts. Keep trusting. Keep believing. Keep walking.

Hymn #573 Lead on Eternal Sovereign