

To Walk Humbly with God

Today's reading from Micah sounds a familiar plea from God. The last verse could be used as an example of the Cliff notes of the Cliff notes of what we are to do as a believer in God. It makes for a good saying on plaques, pillows and anything else that people use to show that they are true believers. However, when we delve into the whole of this reading, we see that there is much more than a catchy phrase that urges us on how to act. So, before we get into this verse and consider what it means to 'do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God,' we should take a look at the whole of the text and see how that further impacts what the prophet Micah has been telling the people. By the way, this verse is one of my favorites, so I am not mocking the use of this verse on plaques and such, I just wish to emphasize that it is much more than a saying, but calling us to a way of life, a way of living with God and with others.

This text is set up as a kind of trial with the mountains as the jury. Notice that unlike the story of the flood and other similar stories, God is not acting unilaterally. God is not using God's power as the creator just to do whatever God wishes. In this text, especially, God is telling the universe that God is fed-up with the actions of the people, of not following the ways God set before them and they agreed to follow. Instead of just stating what the people are not doing, God, through Micah, states God's case for caring for the people - bringing them out of slavery in Egypt; transforming them from a wandering tribe to be a nation in a land; leading a prophet to bless the Israelites instead of cursing them as an enemy king wanted. In short, God is showing how God has kept the covenant God made with the people.

Micah provides a response from the people by asking what God requires of the Israelites. If it more sacrifices that God wants, then the people are willing to go the extra distance. They will be willing to 'give a king's ransom' for their sins if that is what it takes to please God. They would even be willing to do that which goes against their

beliefs and offer up human sacrifices. This by the way, could be seen as a selfish act of trying to save one's own self at the expense of others.

After this, Micah replies on God's behalf of what God really wants. What God requires is not sacrifice, but relationship. This relationship is not only with God but with others, as well. What Micah, the other prophets and the Psalmist are telling us is to do right by our neighbor. God is saying that God does not want acts of penance to make up for what we have done wrong, God wants us to do the right things in the first place. This encouragement of doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God is reflected by Jesus when He tells us what the two greatest commandments are. That is, we are to love God with all our heart, body and soul and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Many sermons have been given exploring what it means to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly. I am not going to explore these aspects of this last verse, but I would like to look closer at the preposition 'with' that is here. I think that by overlooking this preposition, we lose the full meaning of this verse and its implications. By overlooking this preposition, the verse becomes about us and what we need to do. The first implication of this means that God is present, right here we are. Notice that it is not saying that we are walking *to* God as if God is in some far-off place that we are journeying toward. We are not walking *for* God in that we are not God's surrogates acting on behalf of an absentee God. We are not walking *before* God as if we are performing for God, for God's pleasure. All of these prepositions imply a certain amount of detachment between God and us. But God is not detached from us. When we are walking *with* God it means that God walks along with us, in good times and in bad, especially the bad. It is like the picture depicted in the poem "Footprints in the Sand." Despite our thinking that God had abandoned us during the hard times and we are walking alone, that is when Jesus carries us through those times, providing the care we

need to get through them. Even though there are various versions of this poem and the original authorship is not totally clear, this is an example of God not leaving us in times of trouble, of not giving up on us, either as individuals or as a community. It can also be seen as an example of God talking to many people, inspiring others to convey the message of God's presence in our lives.

This text is a good text for use with the rite of Baptism. In our rite of baptism, we pray that the one who is being baptized will seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God through Jesus Christ. Knowing the difficulty in doing this, we also pray that the Holy Spirit provides the gifts that are needed to be successful in our efforts to follow Jesus and these endeavors. This is for what we will be praying when Lillian is baptized in just a short while - that she will walk **with** God in her life's journey and she will have a right relationship with God and others.

The Bible is filled with concise, inspirational verses. However, like all verses in the Bible, we cannot isolate them from the context and the wider message that is being promulgated. Sometimes, we tend to overlook some small, yet important words such as prepositions like 'with' in those verses. By looking at these 'small' words, we get a fuller understanding of the verse and assurances of God's presence among us, of God's love for us. Sometimes these small words get overlooked when we read the Bible and study what God's word means for us. But when include these 'connecting' words, then we see a God who is present, who also walks with us and a God who seeks justice and loves kindness and is faithful.

May we always do justice, love kindness and remember that we are walking humbly **with** God.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/xPXddO3oVcE>

Service: https://youtu.be/2eORuFsa_R0