

January 29, 2017

To Do Justice, and Love Kindness, and Walk Humbly with Your God

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be mediations of our hearts. And be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

We are in the midst of the season of Epiphany. Epiphany of course is that season where Jesus is revealed as the Christ, as the son of God. Revealed both to the people of the Jews and to the Gentiles. We have looked at or seen in the readings so far through this season, Jesus also revealing himself to his disciples. And beginning that call of his disciples to come to be with him to be witnesses. When he is gone. To be witnesses of what he said and what he did. The season of Epiphany in the church year is different lengths depending on when Easter falls. It just so happens that this year we have eight weeks of Epiphany. So, we have the opportunity to expand this revealing not only of who Jesus is but the new message that he has brought both to the people of the covenant, of the Jews but also to the Gentiles. A message that we have glimpses of in the prophets as well.

In the reading from this morning from Micah, we have a glimpse of what Jesus is bringing in his message, in his person, and in his teaching, and in the working of miracles. Micah was a prophet who came on the scene to call the Jews back, repent. Common theme in the prophets. But in this passage that was read this morning, he goes on what do you think that God really wants from you? Do you think that you could make up for your pulling away from God, from your sinfulness by giving sacrifices? Do you think God needs your sacrifices? Do you think God needs the rivers of oil? Do you think if you sacrificed ten thousand rams that will put you in good place with God? Do you think if you even sacrificed your first born that that would somehow make up for your turning away from God? You know oh mortal what God desires. For you to do justice, for you to love kindness, for you to walk humbly with your God.

What does that mean? The people are used to hearing, "Obey the law." You've been given the law so that you know how to be in relationship with God, and how to be in relationship with one another. You have the temple, you have that place of sacrifice. You have your day of atonement. What is Micah trying to say to the people here? The time is coming when what God wants and will demand of you is not some strict adherence to a law. But to live with one another in justice. Where people are treated with respect. Where justice is something that is fair and even for all people not one standard for the rich and another standard for the poor. To do justice for all people. To see that they have what is necessary for the living of their lives. To be fair in your practices with one another. For that is the idea and the dream of God. If we can find a way to do justice for one another, with one another.

To love kindness, love kindness. I love that. To actually want to be kind to one another. And that during the working of our lives wherever we go, whatever we do to be kind to one another. To accept one another, to see one another not as competitors for a limited amount of resources. But to truly be kind, gracious to one another. Knowing that we have enough. Knowing that we don't have to be afraid. To accept the person for who they are. To see the person as God sees them. A heart worth loving. To do kindness. To love kindness.

We all want kindness shown to us. But more than that, we are to show kindness even to the people that are different, even to the people that we are not sure that we share a lot in common with. Even those people that we disagree with. To be kind, caring, see them as some worth. To act with integrity. To walk humbly with your God.

It is a recognition that God is holy other. God is creator. God is the sustainer of life and we are not. We are part of God's creation, but a very special part. A part that has been given the image of God within our souls. To be able to love. To be able to create. And when we walk humbly with our God, we recognize that God is the creator and the sustainer of life. We acknowledge that in the living of our lives. And in acknowledging that, we see one another again as people to care for, and to care about. That we are all in that same situation before God. We are called to honor God with who are and how we live out our lives. To recognize what God wants for us and from us in the living of our lives. And to find joy in that living. To find peace in that living.

Micah had it right. Micah had an understanding of what all the people would be called to. Because the message that we see and the prophet Micah we see being lived out in the person of Jesus. The Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One of God, the Incarnate Son of God showing us what life can be about. To show us what life should be about. To show us the dream of God for creation. Jesus gathered crowds because of the presence that he brought. But also the message that he spoke.

In the gospel according to Matthew the passage that was read this morning, we know it as the sermon on the Mount. I've often thought as Christians we should know the sermon on the Mount every bit as much as we have a sense of knowing the ten commandments. Because this is Jesus calling for us not as a strict adherence to the law. Because he knew that if we lived the life that God wanted for us we would be obeying the law anyway. It would not be something that we looked to or to be afraid of but was within us. Because of the way we chose to live life.

In the words of Micah, to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. All about relationship. And when he teaches on the sermon on the Mount, again it's not about laws, it's not about thou shalt and thou shalt not. It's about blessedness, it's about happiness. It's about living out the life that God intended from the beginning of creation. Blessed are the poor in spirit. On the surface, it sounds kind of strange. Poor in spirit, shouldn't we be rich in spirit. It's only those who understand that they are poor in spirit, who are looking and longing for something more. Looking and longing for more relationship with God. Looking and longing for more relationship with one another. Who recognized that they are poor in spirit. That there is so much more that God wants for them. That we should want for ourselves, that we should want for one another. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they will inherit God's kingdom. Be a part of it, be involved with. God's kingdom.

He goes through so many things. Blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who are hunger and thirst for righteousness. All these things are about living in the kingdom of God. All these things are about recognizing who we are in relationship to God and with one another. Blessed are the peacemakers, they will be called children of God. It's about what we are to be about in the living of our lives. To be merciful, to be peacemakers, to bring God's peace into the relationships that we have with one another, into the encounters that we have with one another. To be merciful, to be forgiven, to be involved, to be people who are connected to one another based on our connection with God. The God who sees us and loves us. The God who wants more for us than we want for ourselves. That's what we are called to be about. That's where the true happiness of

living our lives, to find that joy of life that is talked about so often in both the Old Testament and the New. To understand our place in God's creation. To understand the love that God has for us and in understanding that to be able to begin to see in the people around us. The person that God loves. And we are called to be in a relationship with because if God can love a sinner like me than every person I see I have to acknowledge that God loves them just as much. When I can begin to recognize that in the people around me, when I begin to see in the faces of the people around me not strangers but brothers and sisters. Then life is changing, my life is changing. And our relationship has changed as well. For we are no longer competitors but brothers and sisters. God's own children whom God loves unconditionally. And when I see the people around me in that way then justice is mandatory. Do justice. Kindness is a part of who we are because we are all in this creation together. And we are all seeking the same thing. To live out our life with joy, to have enough, to not be afraid of there not being enough. To be in a relationship with God who continually pulls us to himself. Whether we be a child who is a prodigal who has gone away, who is lost, who has come to themselves and is returning. Whether it is some child who has always been with God. We are to see them as brothers and sisters as beloved children of God. Even as I, even as you are a beloved child of God. That's the message of the kingdom of God.

That is what I believe is the dream of God. If we open ourselves to the spirit of God so much that we are changed. How we see God is changed, not as one to fear, to be afraid to step out of lines but to live our lives understanding and walking humbly with the one who created us, the one who has sustained us, the one who has redeemed us by coming to us as Jesus. That's the dream of God. To be embraced, and to embrace one another. The sermon on the Mount, Jesus begins to share that vision of the kingdom of God. And to tell the people you're invited. You're invited to be a part, because God created you to be a part of that kingdom. And all you have to do is open your heart. All you have to do is allow the spirit of God come in. And you will begin to see and experience those things that Micah spoke about, those things that Jesus taught on that Mount. You will find the hunger and thirst for righteousness. You will find the humility to walk with God as God but also as father. You will have the ability to see a new light shine on one another. Where we no longer see the faces of strangers, but we see the faces of brothers and sisters. Citizens of the kingdom of God.