

Lectionary 33 B 2021 (Occasional: Stewardship)

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

November 14, 2021

Micah 6:8 (stewardship)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear Friends:

One of the big lessons of religion is that simple things can be profound. Things that are easy to say and easy to grasp can be surprisingly weighty. One of the simpler things in the Jewish and Christian religions is the statement of the prophet Micah. *What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* Entire philosophies of life are built around the question, “What kind of person should I be?” What does required to be a good person? Who is my Creator, and what was my Creator expecting when they created me? All the big questions of existence. And in the eighth verse of the sixth chapter of the prophet Micah, we get an eloquent answer: *He 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?*

It’s good wording. It’s three things. Most people can remember three things. To do justice, which is often translated, “act justly,” which is about fairness and honesty and unbiased living. That’s one thing. The second thing is to love kindness. The word kindness there is Hebrew *chesed*. Which is classically translated as loving-kindness. The kind of kindness which demonstrates love. Micah is not just saying to do loving-kindness. He’s saying to love loving-kindness. And then, third, to walk with God in humility. It’s a simple statement. Justice, loving-kindness, and humbleness.

Simple to say. Unlike other Christian formulations, this one does not mention Jesus Christ. It’s from the Old Testament, seven centuries before Jesus. A strict Lutheran reading of Micah 6:8 would call it “Law,” meaning it tells us what God expects of us, but we are not able to do it, to live up to expectations, without the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I said that these simple things can be profound. But to do justice, all the time and consistently, is extraordinarily difficult. And to love kindness, all the time and consistently, is extraordinarily difficult. A strict Lutheran would say that in our attempt to do justice and to love kindness, we will learn humility. Because those things are often very hard to do. Our failures in the first two items will lead us directly to the third item: Walking humbly with your God.

A faith community is a kind of school where we practice these things. A lively and healthy congregation is always engaged in doing these things, learning these things, failing at these things, starting these things over, practicing these things. Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly. These are things that we must do both individually. And collectively. A congregation like Dove of Peace gives us morale for what we must do individually. And it gathers us for what we must do

collectively. Jesus said, “I was hungry and you gave me food.” [Matthew 25:35] And so sometimes you, by yourself, buy some food to give to the food pantry. Or even to place directly into the hands of someone who does not have food. You do that by yourself sometimes, I imagine. But there’s the larger enterprise of mobilizing to feed larger groups of people. The men at the homeless shelter. Or people halfway around the world. And that’s something you do in partnership with others. And then there’s the still larger enterprise of addressing why people do not have food. What’s wrong with a civilization that produces massive obesity and still can’t feed everybody? That requires collective thinking, collective deliberation, collective action. In all of these things, this congregation, Dove of Peace, helps us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

The president of our congregation, Teddi Fowler, is chairing our stewardship campaign for 2022. But she is also chairing a communication team because she believes that there is good news at Dove of Peace that needs to be more effectively shared with the world. So Teddi is upbeat on our congregation and what happens here. How we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Teddi would be very eager to remind you of the services, programs, accomplishments, and venues that our congregation creates. Sometimes *uniquely* creates. We’ll be talking a lot more about that in 2022. There is sort of the *stuff* that we do as a congregation. But there is also *how* we do the stuff that we do. Because in the *how* we do our work, we build friendships, we build community, we discover our selves, and we develop our sense of humor and our resilience. So there’s the *stuff* that we do, such as supporting campus ministry at the University of Arizona, and hosting arts groups and 12-step groups, supporting the Primavera men’s shelter, putting on concerts for charity, once in a while having a jazz band and jambalaya. That’s the *stuff* that we do. But there’s the spirit of community and purpose – which is less tangible– and that is what makes us different from a secular nonprofit agency. Teddi is upbeat on all of that.

And we hope that you will consider making a pledge for 2022. That will support the stuff that we do, as well as the way in which we do that stuff. Uniquely and purposefully as a congregation. He has told you, O mortal what is good. Invest in what is good. In addition to printed pledge forms which will be mailed out this week, this year we offer a very convenient online pledge form. On our website. Dove of peace Tucson dot org. Slash pledge. Dove of peace Tucson dot org. Slash pledge. If you pledge online, after you submit it, you can even set up automated contributions yourself, if that is a convenience for you. And you can control with your own userid and password. If you like to control that stuff yourself.

At least think about it. The process of thinking about a pledge is a process of doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with your God. It’s about thinking of your fair share of the resources that it takes. It’s about loving others as much as you love yourself. It’s about humbly recognizing that we do not what we ought, but what we are able. Please think about it. I’m asking you to consider something that may be uncomfortable or difficult. I understand that. But it is important.

In the service folder, I've made a list of nine substantial upheavals that have happened in the worshiping life of Dove of Peace in the last eighteen months. Eliminating worship services, providing alternate worship services, re-scheduling worship services. And everybody's favorite: masks off, masks on, masks off, masks on. Now if you know much about the history of this congregation, you will know that Dove of Peace never changed its worship patterns. At least once a year, someone will show up for a worship service at an hour when we don't have a worship service. They will not have been to Dove of Peace in twenty five or thirty years. And they don't call or check the website. They just show up like it's still the first term of the Bill Clinton presidency. Where's Pastor Greg Adolf? What happened? I just smile and tell them that we decided to not have church. Everybody took the day off to listen to Vice President Al Gore give his speech. You know, the important speech about the significance of AOL for the American economy. Dove of Peace did not historically do well with change. But nine changes in only eighteen months! If we didn't have a sense of humor, we would be suffering from whiplash. If we didn't have the grace of God, we would be unable to function. So I compliment you on your flexibility. Our congregation's president, Teddi, would say she is proud of us.

In just a few seconds, we are going to sing our hymn of the day. With words by one of my favorite contemporary composers. *The church of Christ in every age, beset by change, but Spirit led. Must claim and test its heritage and keep on rising from the dead.* Beset by change. Beset by change. But Spirit led! Must claim its heritage. And test its heritage! And keep on rising from the dead. That's what we have been doing, and doing pretty well. *What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* By God's grace, we continue to rise to the challenge. Amen.