

Date: January 29, 2023 (Epiphany 4)

1. Texts: Micah 6:1-8; Ps. 15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: Christian character.
4. Aim: encourage.
5. Proposition: "God has expectations of his people."

GOD'S EXPECTATIONS

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?"¹ That's the question Micah's prophecy placed before the Israelites. Everyone knew back then that worshipping God always meant bringing him tithes of grain or flocks or temple coins. With this question, Micah raised the issue of fulfilling God's expectations, and people clearly knew that God had expectations.

Over the millennia, we seem to have rather watered down this idea of fulfilling God's expectations. Most people would easily say, "Just be nice to people, don't intentionally hurt others and basically follow those Ten Commandments, and you'll be ok. In fact, you don't even have to offer any tithe to God or even go to Church. Just be good and that'll be good enough."

But Micah knew that God had expectations of his faithful people. But they weren't the expectations the Jews were expecting.

According to Micah, God expectations have nothing to do with wealth of any kind. Calves, thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil—none of that will fulfill God's expectations. Not even human sacrifice would be enough to satisfy God. No, God expects something very different.

⁸He 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?²

Shocking, no? It is not your wealth which God requires. It is your soul. God has expectations of you as a human being.

¹ Micah 6:6.

² Micah 6:8.

Each of these three expectations are linked to doing things. Faith is not something we have. It is something we do. People won't recognize our faith through our words, but only through our actions. We live faithfully, if we are faithful to God. Faith is a verb in each of these expectations.

We are to "do justice." It's not that we are to "be just". We are to *act justly*. We are to *complete justice*. In this sense, justice is also a verb, an action word.

Justice is the correct and equitable application of laws, policies and principles by the entire community, its constituent parts, and their systems and institutions. Justice is not about what is "fair". Rather, it is about the application of righteousness, equality and love to all in society. Justice will take into consideration the situation of each group and their history within society. Justice is blind to race, creed, and culture. Justice seeks to give benefits to the oppressed and a firm foundation to all. Justice is systemic equality in opportunities, the distribution of resources and in the rights accorded to all people and groups.

We are to do justice, which demands that we share in social responsibility for all. We are to fight for justice, when we are confronted with social evils. Each individual is to act justly for the sake of the entire community. As institutions, systems, nations and individuals we are to do justice. That's what God expects of us.

God also expects that we will "love kindness". This expectation is also centred on a verb, "to love". It's not that we are kind, but that we love kindness, that we are committed to doing kindness because of the love we have for humanity. Justice without kindness can become a weapon of the majority wielded against a minority. Loving kindness assures that we will take the actual circumstances of individuals and groups into account as we live justly. We will grieve over the injustices of the past because of loving kindness, and our grief will propel us towards addressing those injustices. We are to love kindness.

God expects that we will "walk humbly" with him. This, also, doesn't fit in well with contemporary society. We are told, time and again, in a myriad number of ways, that we are to take pride in ourselves, in our accomplishments and in

our cultures. Billions of people throughout the world now and in the millennia past actually believe that we have the ability to understand all things. Elite athletes insist that you can do anything you want if you only put your mind to it. You can be anything you want if you only want it enough. The original sin in the Garden of Eden was pride, as the woman saw that the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil would make her like God. We don't really have a feeling for this "walk-humbly-with-your-God" expectation.

To walk humbly with God is to live as if you actually needed God for your survival. To walk humbly is to steer your life with humility as both your engine and your goal. Humbleness is a characteristic of the human soul. We acknowledge our need of God and our subordinate relationship to him. We live knowing we need others to make life work. Humility enables us to relax as we seek support from God and others. The humble person embraces the truth that we are not ever good enough or strong enough or smart enough to make life work on our own.

Modern western society works hard to bury humility beneath pride and arrogance, but Micah insisted that humility was essential to faithful living. And, again, this is something that we do. We prove that we are humble by living humbly. We prove our humble character by showing humility in our interactions with God and others. The person faithful to God walks humbly with God.

⁸He 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?

The believer who worships God brings not just a tithe to God, but his whole life. The disciple of Jesus lives for and with God by doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God. This is what God expects of us. Now, if we can only expect it of ourselves.

AMEN.