

4 Epiphany Yr A, 2/02/2020  
Micah 6:1-8 & Matt 5:1-12  
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“Life is about relationships”

Life is about relationships. As you know, there are different kinds of relationships. We have relationships with our grandparents, parents, spouse and children; our larger family; members of our parish and community at large; members of the larger church and even in the larger world with people in school and the workplace, where we shop, and maybe even with politicians, and on and on the list goes. Life is about relationships, which can be: intimate, caring, loving and healthy, as well as distant, strained, complicated, conflicted, broken—and, worst case scenario, abusive and destructive, and again the list could go on and on.

Life is about relationships. The most important relationship is, of course, our relationship with God. In both our first lesson from Micah and today’s gospel, the overall emphasis is on relationships—our relationship with God and our relationship with one another. Both of these passages are rooted in what Jesus said when he summarized the way we as his followers are to live: Love the LORD your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself. Both our first lesson and today’s gospel are basically saying the same thing.

In that wonderful passage from Micah, we have three sections. First, we have a picture of mountains and hills, the natural world being called to be witnesses to the conversation between the LORD and his people in verses one and two.

Then, in the second section, verses three to five, we have God speaking directly to his people. The sense here is God the loving parent lamenting over his children who seem to have forgotten what God has done for them, and maybe even turned away from God. God reminds them of what he did for them by referring to the exodus out of Egyptian slavery; providing leaders like Moses, Aaron and Miriam; getting Balaam the prophet to bless the Israelites instead of cursing them as King Balak had wanted him to do; and allowing the Israelites to cross the Jordan into the promised land and settle there. These were the saving acts of the LORD that his people seemed to have forgotten about.

Finally, in section three, verses six to eight, the prophet is speaking and refers to the familiar ways in which people could worship God by offering sacrifices prescribed by the sacrificial system in the Law. The last suggestion refers to a human sacrifice, reminiscent of Abraham offering his son Isaac. However, you remember that the LORD stopped Abraham. Then, in verse eight, Micah gets to the heart and soul of the matter. True religion, and a loving, caring, healthy relationship with God involves doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with your God. Doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with your

God summarizes the prophetic tradition of ancient Israel. This verse is a reminder that life is about relationships. Doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly are all descriptions of who God is and what God is doing. Moreover, they are also descriptions of who we are and what we are called to do in response to what God has done for us. We are people created in God's image and baptized followers of Jesus. In response to his saving acts for us we are called to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.

At least three of the beatitudes in our gospel also have close parallels with Micah 6:8. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth," is very similar to "walk humbly with your God," or as the Good News Bible puts it: "live in humble fellowship with our God." "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled," is very similar to "do justice, and to love kindness." In Matthew, hungering and thirsting means being committed to doing God's will; which is also what it means to do justice and to love kindness in the Micah passage. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy," is very similar to "love kindness" in the Micah passage.

So what does it mean for you and I to live in relationship with God and with one another? Well, let's take a closer, albeit brief look at justice, kindness, walking humbly, meekness, righteousness, and mercy. Here we go.

Justice can be defined as follows: "Justice is to sort out what belongs to whom, and to return it to them." (Walter Brueggemann, et al, *To Act*

*Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly*, p. 5) Indeed, the Jubilee year in the Old Testament is based in part on this definition of justice. It calls for a redistribution of wealth so that everyone has enough; to prevent those most powerful from being too greedy and exploiting the weakest and poorest in society. In other words, God wants a world, a society in which everyone is equal in God's eyes, valued, treated with respect, and given the opportunity to have equal access to the basic necessities of life.

Here is one example: Amnesty International recently carried out a campaign appealing to the government of Bangladesh and the international community to allow Rohingya refugee children to attend schools and get an education in Bangladesh. The campaign was successful, now these poor, refugee children can go to school to improve their lot in life by getting an education. In short, justice and righteousness is about doing God's will by holding governments and powerful companies and individuals accountable; by insisting that the poor and most vulnerable in society are cared for, respected and loved.

Loving kindness and being merciful are also one and the same. The biblical sense of kindness and mercy involve, among other things the ability to look beyond one's own self interests by thinking of others, and empathizing with others; by walking in their shoes; by doing acts that may be costly to you personally for the betterment of others.

Here's one example: A former coach of Norway's cross-country skiers became something of a national hero in Canada, after he impulsively

aided a Canadian competitor who went on to win a silver medal in a sprint relay. The Norwegian skiers ended up fourth.

Bjørnar Håensmoen was on the scene when Canadian cross-country skier Sara Renner's left pole broke during the sprint relay final. He immediately gave her his, and that enabled Renner and team mate Beckie Scott to ultimately claim the relay's silver medal.

Håensmoen claims he simply reacted like any good sport should, telling the newspaper *Toronto Sun* that Norwegian policy calls for handing over poles or skis in time of need.

"We talked about it at our team meeting the night before," he told the Toronto paper. "We are a country which believes in fair play."

According to Canadian Mark Rice: "In a world gone mad...with even the simplest of misunderstandings leading to violence the world over, it's heartening to see that we can still be human. The selfless act of Bjørnar Håensmoen...in handing a new ski pole to Canadian Sara Renner, during the heat of competition, without thought as to how the outcome might have affected his own team, stands alone in my mind as one of the brightest moments I can recall in this, or any other Olympics."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to these responses to our relationship with God and one another, there is also "walking humbly" and being meek. Neither walking humbly nor being meek mean that we are doormats. NO! Rather, our perfect example of being humble and meek is Jesus himself.

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<sup>1</sup> "Canadians hail Norwegian coach's sportsmanship," <[www.aftenposten.no](http://www.aftenposten.no)>, February 20, 2006.

He enters Jerusalem as a king unlike any earthly sovereign: “meet and mounted on an ass” (21:5). He depends neither on bribes nor cruelty, neither on coins nor scourgings. He comes to serve and refuses to ride high or live high at the expense of others.

In the New Testament meekness...means renouncing all boasting of our imagined goodness or spirituality as we contemplate the wayward, and it means commitment to restoring them gently (Gal 6:4).<sup>2</sup> Walking humbly and being meek is a whole way of orienting life. It isn't an attitude of being so high and mighty that you look down on all others because you believe you are superior to them. Nor is it the “know-it-all” and “have-it-all” and “self-made” attitude that rejects others and God because they see no need for others or for God. Rather, walking humbly and being meek relies on God's love and grace every single day to be able to do the LORD's will by loving him and our neighbour.

May each of us be blessed to respond to God and neighbour by: doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God; by meekness, righteousness and showing mercy. In so doing, hopefully we will remember that life is about relationships.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert H. Smith, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), p. 83.