

**Sermon: Seek Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly****Scripture: Micah 6:8; Matthew 9:9-13****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: November 6, 2016**

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The deal is actually pretty simple. We are each and everyone of us given this life as gift. None of us have been given it due to our own deserving or because we won it or earned it, but this life is pure unadulterated gift. I guess we can choose to believe it's come about by random happenstance and therefore our lives are our own and we make of them what we feel like. I guess we could believe that, but if we are people of faith, we don't. Instead we say that life is granted to us by some power, Someone, greater than ourselves and in the acknowledgement of this gratuitous gift there is a response that is necessary; a response of gratitude for what has been given, yes, but also a response to the Someone Greater Than Ourselves that is uttered by the way we choose live it.

Our religious tradition teaches that God did not create humanity and say "have at it! Do unto this earth and one another whatever you want! I'll be sittin' back and enjoyin' the spectacle of it!" I mean, we could have had a God who was something of a sadist and a spectator of life, but what is revealed in our sacred scripture is that we have a Maker who is deeply involved and we learn from Jesus that our Maker is not involved by way of control and domination but by way of relationship and love, and this is how we are to live this life as a result.

It's not very complicated. We humans like to try and complicate it but really it's very simple. Ancient Israel complicated it with a whole system of temple practices and legal codes and daily regulations and requirements that you could follow and win or fail to follow and lose, your worth and value thereby determined, but when their society became corrupted with those on top winning everything and the bottom crushed in return, the prophets showed up – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Micah and their message time and time again was the message Micah gave clearly: "Wait a minute," Micah says "we've lost our way. Burnt offerings, rivers of oil, prostration before the living God and the giving of your first fruits? That's your focus without a care for one another? God has shown you clearly what is good for

you mortals. This is what is required of you - to seek justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." All the rest is fluff, extraneous, superfluous.

And then Jesus came quoting the prophet Isaiah - "I've come to bring good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed" and he went and called Matthew the tax collector to follow him while the holy religious leaders of the day said - "he's eating with sinners, he's breaking dietary regulations, he's bucking centuries of tradition, he's changing everything!" And Jesus says "go and learn the meaning of this scripture, you scholars of the tradition - I do not ask you for sacrifices, says God, I ask you for mercy!" The prophets of Israel and Jesus himself make it clear that we are to respond to this gift of life by showing mercy, seeking justice, by walking humbly with one another and our God. And they make it abundantly clear that where the rubber meets the road, where the real evidence lies for whether we are living in this way or not is how we are treating the most vulnerable and oppressed among us. In the words of the prophets these were represented by widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor. The prophets in their condemnation of Israel saying "you mistreat and discard the most vulnerable among you and God is not happy with that, not happy at all, in fact, beware of the consequences of your neglect of the oppressed!" And Jesus says in Matthew much in the same way - when you do to the least of these, the hungry, the naked, the prisoner, you do unto to me and when you discard, disregard, hurt them, you do so also to me.

What does the Lord, our Maker, require of us in response to the gift of this life that He has given us - to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly. We must learn, as Jesus commands us, to go and show mercy, always mercy.

That means mercy is the barometer, not ritual performance or the tradition;

That means mercy is the bottom line, not profit;

That means mercy is to be our goal not our own safety;

That means having mercy is more important than having victory.

When we are deciding on our course of action, when we are discerning God's direction and call for us, it means asking - is this an expression of mercy? Then we should do it. Does this hurt, marginalize, objectify others, *especially* those with little power and those most vulnerable? Then we should not do it.

It's really not rocket science.

... but it's not necessarily real easy either, especially when we ourselves are not suffering the injustice or on the margins – did you hear what we confessed this morning with the help of Martin Luther King – we said “forgive us when we actively address personal injustice but stand idly by when we experience systemic injustices that hurt others.” Ouch. I don't know about you but that cuts to the quick for me.

But putting ourselves in the shoes of others is what it means to be Christian. We proclaim that Jesus died to reveal God's love for ALL, not just a select group of us and so wherever we find our paths crossed and our hearts convicted by injustice done against God's creation, God's creatures, we are called to address it, asked to correct it, as though it was injustice done to ourselves and our own family. We are asked to put our weight on the side of the vulnerable, the voiceless and the oppressed and this is to be our response to the life given us by a God like ours.

So we can go to the voting booth as Christians this Tuesday and vote in different ways for different candidates and for different sides of the questions posed, but what is required of us and what binds us as people of faith – is that our vote be based upon our best estimation for what will bring justice and encourage mercy and a humble walk with God. We might fall on different sides of the political spectrum in our assessment of what will best bring that about, but we are all aiming at the same thing.

At the communion table we are all on the same side and receiving the gift of life and life renewed by the God of Love. This table suggests that God doesn't just sit up on high and say “do this and don't do that people!” God comes down, becomes enfleshed and as one of us experiences the joys and the consequences of seeking justice and loving mercy and walking, humbly, humbly across the lands of Palestine and vulnerably to a cross so that we are not alone in our own walk and so that we can be company for those around us who feel alone in theirs... for that is the good and right response to the gift of this life that we have been given. Amen.