

Walking Humbly with God (Micah 6:8)

A Sermon preached by Stuart Taylor

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What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, to walk humbly with your God? For the last two weeks we have been reflecting together on Micah 6:8 on what it means to do justice, to love kindness. And so we come to the third of these great admonitions. What does the Lord require of you but to walk humbly with your God? I marvel at the prophet Micah's ability as a poet to capture in one line the essence of faith. Micah's words point us to the interrelatedness of all three dimensions of his prophetic call. Micah did not believe that the first two doing justice and loving kindness have to do only with our relationships with people and the last one pertains only to God. All three address our covenant relationship with people; all three address our covenant relationship to God. We recognize that when we live and act justly, when we love tenderly, we are already walking humbly with our God. It is daily companionship with the God who is humble enough to walk with us, step by step through each year, day, and hour of our lives that empowers us to do justice and to love kindness.

Walking is a subject dear to my heart for many of you know that I am a passionate hiker. There is nothing more rejuvenating to me than a good hike is. What more could you ask for? Being out in God's beautiful creation, the deep breathing of cool fresh air, good exercise that works out the tensions of your body and soul. Walking is about finding your pace, your rhythm. Often, for the first half of the hike I am not yet in the groove. I am still in my head, thinking about this or that. My body is stiff and awkward. But at some point, I hit the groove. Mental activity calms down, I get quiet, and out of my head into my body into the moment, soaking up sensual input from my mountain trail environment. With each step, I feel more grounded and rooted in the earth. There is something deeply healing about feeling the earth underneath your feet. There is something about the task of walking that establishes an essential balance or rhythm in our being between body and soul. You can see then for a passionate hiker like myself it is only a hop, skip and a jump from the experience of a good hike of walking itself to the Gospel story. When we read the Gospels we cannot escape the fact that walking is the most basic metaphor for the Discipleship journey. Gospel begins with a discussion about footwear; John the Baptist says of Christ: I am not worthy to untie his sandals. They are talking about footwear. Jesus invites the disciples to go on a walkabout. A foot journey from 'the far reaches of the wilderness in Galilee, eventually winding down south to the capital city, Jerusalem. And when Jesus sends out the apostles two by two, one of the few things they can take with them is a walking stick. There is something about walking that is so basic to the Christian faith.

There is a marvelous ambiguity to this phrase as Walter Bruggeman observes. Micah 6:8 could certainly be interpreted to mean that we walk humbly because God is magnificent, awe-inspiring, and holy. But you could also interpret this to mean that we walk humbly because God himself took on human flesh and walked humbly among us, and does so even now. God's humility is the most awe-inspiring thing of all. To walk humbly with God means that at the deepest center, we see our lives as a sacred pilgrimage. Joseph Campbell says the true universal myth of all cultures and religions is the journey. This

image of a walking journey, a quest, a search for the holy, answers a deep need inside of many people of faith. How about you and your own individual faith journey? Are we aware that we are on a journey? What kind of journey is it? Faith is being able to look back and make sense out of the past, to see a pattern, a connection to all these disparate events and a trail if you will. Hope is the ability to trust in that deep instinct, call it a sense of direction that allows us to believe that we will find our way; that the trail will continue. We all have trail maps in our head, images that help us to feel that our lives are moving in a meaningful direction. What I am suggesting to you is that for the Christian, the truest and best trail map we have is the Gospel story; the story of the discipleship journey. If we look back it is faith that allows us to make sense of the past, to see a pattern. If we look to the future, it is hope that allows us to believe that the trail leads to journey's end, our home. But it is love that allows us to enter the present, fully deeply. It is the awareness that each step of our journey is a gift of Love from the one who gave us life. And so we walk in love, as we take the next step in this discipleship journey. Walking is always this one step firmly grounded in the present. The next faithful step. Not looking back too much. Not looking forward too much but taking this step. The next faithful step. Living life in this moment. Going through whatever lesson it is that the journey is serving up to you at this bend in the road. Maybe this is part of what the prophet Micah meant with the phrase, "Walk humbly with your God". Perhaps humble walking is to know that we are capable of only one step at a time.

This week I allowed that phrase humbly walking to turn over and over again in my heart and mind. And it led to some challenging implications of humbly walking that I have not considered before. So let us go a bit deeper what would be the implications of walking humbly with God? How would we see differently our lives and the world around us? What does humbly walking mean in the context of the religions of the world? We live in a profoundly pluralistic world with Christians, Muslims, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and many more religious traditions across our planet. What does it mean for the Christian to walk humbly with God in a pluralistic world? I believe it means to renounce what some call Christian triumphalism, the assumption that our religion is the only way to God. It is a balancing act to be sure: to be deeply convicted about the divine revelation that has been enacted in Jesus of Nazareth. And at the same time to offer respectful space for other religions. I have been working on this in myself for a while and I think I can say honestly that I have no desire for a Muslim to become a Christian. Or for a Jew, or Hindu or Buddhist. What I want is that a Muslim be a good Muslim. A Jew be a good Jew. A Buddhist a good Buddhist. Maybe Christians

This week I allowed that phrase humbly walking to turn over and over again in my heart and mind. And it led to some challenging implications of humbly walking that I have not considered before. Maybe Christians who walk humbly should be most concerned about nothing more than being good Christians. Every human being is made in the image of God. Every human culture, every religious tradition has within it some glimpse of the divine. God is at work everywhere. Christians do not have a monopoly on the truth. Christians have much to offer inter-religious dialogue. But we also have much to learn. Could this be the humble walking that God calls us to in our pluralistic world?

Another way humble walking could be interpreted is in relationship to the non-human world. It is now irrefutable scientific fact that all life is a unified web, mutual and inter-dependent in life giving ways. We are on the cusp of dramatic scientific breakthroughs in our understanding of the awareness and behavior, the very being of our fellow creatures

from the animal kingdom. Perhaps in this age of environmental destruction, humble walking means we need to do justice and love kindness for our non-human neighbors. God knows it is the human species that has proudly exalted itself above all other life forms as if every other life form is here only to serve our own human needs. Are we not called to take our proper place in the God-given order of things, a species among countless species humbly walking alongside all the other creatures with whom we share this planet?

What does the Lord require of you but to walk humbly with your God? To walk humbly with God means that the life of faith is not just a matter of faith, of what we believe but it is a matter practice. Not talking the talk but walking the walk. This is just the problem that Micah takes on here. God's will for you Micah tells Israel is not found in correct worshipping no matter how sacrificial or generous. God is concerned less with the character of your worship and more with the character of your living. Our discipleship, our following Jesus is life lived out in the doing of it. Taking the next faithful step. What is the next step in your journey? I don't know what that may be for you. It may be little or big. Profoundly consequential or seemingly inconsequential. But whatever that step is take it with awareness, with mindfulness. And if the way seems hard right now for you, if the trail carries you through a time of hardship or suffering, know that it is only this next step that you must face, that you must take. If it is a happy time, slow down enough to enjoy it. The pace of life can be quite overwhelming. But if we can learn to break life down into steps that we can face and take for ourselves then we are walking humbly with God. So we saunter toward the Holy Land. So we make our pilgrimage. Walk in love, as Christ has loved us. In humility, in the presence of God, walk in holiness for I have become convinced that holiness is nothing more than humility. Walk as children of light. Walk wisely for the days are evil. Look carefully how you walk. Take each step in the sure and certain knowledge that God walks with us on the path of life. The Buddhist monk, Thich Nant Hanh has written: Our true home is in the present moment. "To live in the present moment is a miracle. The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green earth in the present moment – to appreciate the peace and beauty that are available now. Peace is all around us – in the world and in nature- and within us- in our bodies and our spirits. Once we learn to touch this peace, we will be healed and transformed. It is not a matter of faith. It is a matter of practice."

What does the Lord require of you? Micah's question, simply but powerfully cuts through all the unnecessary trappings of religious experience to the basic existential question that is at the core of human existence. What does the Lord require of you? And the answer? Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your God. These three may embody all that we need to know in order to fulfill our destiny as human beings, as children of God. They are not virtues per se. They are not three things to put on your to do list. Rather they are three inter-related dimensions of the life of faithfulness, each one depending on and reinforced by the others. For a community of faith to be genuinely and biblically prophetic, all three of these dimensions must remain interrelated and in balance. May the God of Micah enable every one of us in this community of faith, to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God. Let the people say" Amen".