

SERMON: "WALKING HUMBLY WITH GOD"
TEXTS: NEW TESTAMENT MATTHEW 5:1-12
OLD TESTAMENT MICAH 6:6-8

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Dr. Dave Kivett

INTRODUCTION

I've been blessed to be a part of capital campaigns at each of the churches I have served. At the church in Georgia we had two parking lots and two driveways, one of which was too close to a stoplight making it dangerous to turn left into our driveway

One of the things we did with that campaign was to link those two parking lots with one central driveway in front of the church which sat back from the road. The new driveway was a bit long and curvy which gave Larry, one of our elders, an idea. He really liked the benediction I use, the one from Micah about what God requires. You've heard it a few times – those three things

Larry's idea was to take those three things and paint them on the driveway, or on stones near the drive so you'd see them on your way out "do justice" then a few more yards away, "love mercy" and then a bit farther "walk humbly with God" – Think like billboards along the road and, for those you may remember, like Burma shave signs

We didn't follow through on Larry's idea – but I like it. It may not have fit that driveway, but it fits this sermon. These three requirements fit together and flow (remember that is how Amos and later Martin Luther King Jr talked about justice ... rolling down like water)

This morning I want to focus on that flow, that walking ... walking humbly. Our scripture lessons for today are favorites from two deacons, Judy Klepfer and Sharon Porter, who picked the same favorite, Micah 6:8
God 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?

With that familiar Old Testament verse, we paired a New Testament favorite from Ai Elgersma, a few verses from the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount verses five and seven about who it is that is considered blessed.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

I like how these go together – who we are and what we do. These two are very much intertwined. We are what we do. There is a bit of both being and doing in both verses. Doing justice and being merciful while walking humbly.

MEEK?

Both passages speak to what God wants / expects from us

Micah spells it out clearly – three points

Jesus, in the beatitudes, paints a picture of how God sees things with the repeated refrain of “blessed are” followed by some surprising answers ... the meek? The merciful?

Jesus tells us “blessed are the meek.” And we think “huh?”

If I asked you to use the word meek in a sentence without quoting this verse what would you say? It’s not a word we would pair with blessed

It may even be used as a put down – a synonym for weak

Just as Jesus defines the world differently, Jesus defines the word ‘meek’ differently

Tom Long in his commentary offers a good definition

Meekness is not timidity or passivity but rather a patient trusting that God will act in due time, an insistence on being non-violent in a violent society, a contentment with the basic necessities in a possession-hungry world and taking delight in the many gifts of God and the many comforts of faith.

Back when I served a church in North Carolina I was asked to do the baccalaureate address at the high school. The Episcopal rector was asked to do the same at the county high school. Being a small town, a summary of each message was offered in the town newspaper

My message was the typical address – go make a difference in the world
The rector offered a slightly different message. His point was more about being than doing. He wanted to let the graduates know it was and is perfectly okay to be okay. You don’t have to change the world. Just be who you are.

When I think “blessed are the meek” I remember the rector’s message
You may not win the Nobel prize or the blue ribbon, that is okay
You may not see your name in lights or in the headlines, that is okay
You may not win the rat race. And that’s okay ... even blessed

The world with ever its competitive way of defining value
does not define what it is to be blest. God does!

Walking humbly doesn’t mean we have to walk faster or walk up front
A whole bunch of justice gets done, a whole bunch of mercy happens
in the middle of the masses and all the way at the back of the line
and at the bottom of the so called ladder. And that is okay!

Walking humbly is a matter of being and doing
Doing justice and doing the work of being merciful
Loving mercy, showing mercy, practicing mercy

JUSTICE & MERCY

Let me say just a few words about doing justice and then talk more about mercy
Back to the church in NC. I had a member who regularly argued with me
about the benediction I used. She insisted it is do justly, not do justice.
I insisted back that it is indeed justice ... understood in a plural sense

Sure it is a good thing to do justly in your coming and going
Treat people fairly with respect and with dignity. But justice in the bible
is bigger than that, more than our circle of friends and family

Justice in the bible (read the prophets) is about our economic and legal systems
It is how the neediest are treated not just by you or by me but within the systems
we use. Justice is about how we shape, and yes challenge, those systems.

An example. Recycling is one good way to care for God's creation
but it doesn't make that much of a difference for you to do it if the community
does not have a good program for how to handle those recyclables.
We do justice by making sure our cities have those kind of programs

Now about loving mercy, being merciful. First thing to notice is the need for mercy
Look at the verse again ... what is it that the merciful receive as a blessing?
They will receive mercy! Anybody in need of some mercy?

Isn't God's mercy the bedrock on which we build the church?
There are other organizations doing justice
There are other organization teaching good values to us and to our children.
The Church does these things too. But back to basics
what we are about is mercy ... loving mercy, showing mercy

Going back to that idea of flow. Justice flows. So does mercy.
I would suggest that what mercy does is break through the dams, the clogs,
that keep us from walking with God as we could and should.
Without the gift of mercy, we get stuck. We can't do justice or walk humbly

We know a thing or two about that. We've carried old grudges around far too long.
We let differences become divisions. We find it easy to pin the blame, all of it,
on them be it a member of our own family or be it some other person or people
we have not bothered to get to know ... but we know what's wrong with them.

We find it easy to be angry and even self-righteous in our anger
Have you noticed those angry tones in what we hear and what we read?
We tell ourselves our anger is justified. But what we really need is mercy

We've done the same thing with our own guilt. Sometimes the hardest.
person to forgive is ourselves. The guilt haunts like a ghost.
We get stuck and seem to forget all about God's mercy
We've heard that God's mercy is from everlasting to everlasting
We've heard that it is free, a gift ... but we wonder if that gift is for us

SUMMARY

Yes. That gift is for us ... and for them

God's grace is general admission - not assigned seating, not luxury suites

God's mercy is freely given so that it might then be freely shared

We can be merciful. We can show mercy and share mercy.

We can love mercy ... because we have received it

Let's be real. What we need first and foremost is mercy.

What the world needs is mercy, God's mercy

Which, let's be clear, is meant to be shared.

That mercy is shared by walking humbly with God.

It is shared by doing justice. They all go together

They all go together, those three things I mention every Sunday

They flow like my friend Larry suggested

They need not be in order, but they go together and reinforce one another

Doing justice by loving mercy and walking humbly

I went to the funeral of my friend Robert last week. I knew him through the NAACP.

He was the vice president. I am on the executive committee.

We rode together several time to state meetings in Des Moines or Dubuque

The best part of those meetings was the ride there and back with Robert

We'd talk about many things, we laughed a lot. Robert's standard line

accompanied by his laughter, was to say "Man, you just ain't right"

He always meant it as a compliment.

I'm going to ask you to think about your life as it is

And I'm going to take Robert's words and apply them as a diagnostic tool

What just ain't right in your life? I'm asking you to think about that

Think and pray about that situation, how you might be stuck

Think about what may be wrong, what might be broken

and instead of worrying so much about who's right, try this ...

Ask yourself which is more important? Being right? Or making it right?

Let me be so bold as to say this ... a suggestion about your flow, how you roll

Live by this standard. It is more important to make it right than it is to be right.

I'd go so far as to say that focusing on making it right

Doing what you can do to make it right,

not dwelling on what you think they ought to do

is a good way to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God

What can you do to make it right?