

Christ Church, Georgetown
Sunday, January 29, 2017, Epiphany 4A
The Rev. Kristen Hawley

How do we live? How do we live as people marked as Christ's own in a beautiful, yet broken world on a good day, let alone on a day when nations, communities and families are dividing like cancerous cells and vitriol has entered almost every discussion, debate, article and interview? Friends, I ask this question in all seriousness, for I think that we all feel at a loss, regardless of what political, social, economic or religious viewpoint we view the current day through – at a loss for how to live faithfully and boldly when there are such chasms between us. How do we live as Christ's body right now – what does God wish for and require of God's people?

As luck would have it, the people of the prophet Micah's times were asking themselves a similar question. You see Micah, a contemporary of the better known Isaiah, was sent by God to be a prophet to a divided and contemptuous Southern Kingdom of Judah. To God's people of Judah, Micah called out *Rise up, plead your case, plead your case to God in God's courtroom, before the mountains, the hills and valleys, the earth and all of creation as your jury, for the Lord, you see, had a controversy with his people.* And his people, who most likely looked a whole lot like us right now, tried to buy and haggle their way out of their current predicament.

What, God, they cried, *with what shall we come before the Lord* to make amends, how do we fix this, how do we live your way... what do you require of us? Now, where they offered burnt offerings, young calves, rams, rivers of oil and even their firstborn if needed, we offer what? Well, I'll let you fill in the blanks for yourselves right now on what you have been offering to God and share with you my meager offerings. I have offered a hung head and barely audible prayers, I have offered to stick my head in the sand a few times to avoid confrontation and took it out again only to lash out at my own father with an anger and vitriol that shocked us both. I have offered to wring my hands and wonder how to help lead a faith community through these difficult and divided times, while shaking my head at many of my colleagues who stopped wringing and began beating drums and taking sides and showing no mercy or kindness for the other side. And probably like each and every one of you here, I think that, if only everyone could stop yelling and accusing and listen to reason (the reason that sounds an awful lot like my own voice), if only the "other" side would learn how to compromise and hear, again, my voice – then surely God's will would be done, the good Christian that I am.

So what does God have to say to God's people who mess things up and come to offer sacrifice, hubris and self-righteousness in his name? Let's ask the mountains, the hills and valleys... Let's ask his prophet Micah... *He has told you, O mortal(s), 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.* To do justice, love kindness and to walk humbly with your God. Tattoo it friends, if you haven't already, across your hearts – these words of truth and look at them, inwardly digest them, for they are at the heart of God, the heart of his Son and the heart of each and every one of us created in his image and marked as his own by the waters of Baptism. They mark our hearts, but they should also mark our lives as clearly as a brand on our cheek or thunderbolt on our forehead. They are our Baptismal creed reduced to its very core. How do we live? We live by doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly, humbly with our God.

Let's spend just a moment and break down the simplicity and audacity of God's answer to our cry of how to live in a time where everyone claims righteousness and yet our treatment of one another is less than right. First – do justice. Not, we must notice, love or like justice. Not talk about or write about justice – but do justice. This is a relational matter, not unlike the Beatitudes given in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Bratcher, Dennis. crivoice.org), where God compels us into relationship with one another by providing for one another, righting wrongs, shedding light in injustices and inequalities, setting aside some of our own gleanings for the sake of those who have none or little, lifting up the poor, the destitute, the sick, the lonely, the imprisoned, the refugee. Doing justice is an active imperative that will look different in all of our lives, but should mark us, without a doubt, as God's people – with one little catch that we will explore in just a minute.

The second demand that God makes on us, friends is to love kindness or to love mercy in many translations. Again – this is a relational directive, rather than a legalistic one. In Hebrew, the word is *hesed*, which is hard to translate because it is used in scripture to describe God. The God of *hesed* – of steadfast love, covenantal faithfulness, of mercy, kindness, compassion, the God of a love that cannot be broken. This love being asked of us is not the love of feeling, but of doing – the love of promise, love as action for loves sake and not for the sake of love returned. The God of *hesed* calls us to be people of *hesed* – people of steadfast love. No exceptions.

The third demand on us by our God is the ultimate qualifier. That we are to do all of these things while walking humbly with our God. We are to do justice humbly, for and with God – not our own self-satisfaction or drive to be right. We are to be merciful, kind and loving humbly – not resentfully, not in hopes for a return on our investment, not until the other is undeserving, but humbly with God as our source of *hesed*... as the mark on our lives.

Jesus calling the people to him on the mountain top to bless them so that they might be a blessing to the world was not something new for our God, friends. It was a continuation of the steadfast love and blessing that God has always been trying to give us. We have been marked, we have been blessed so that we will be and do the same. Not because we are always right. Not because we stand on the “right” side of today’s current debate, division or fence – but because God is just, steadfast and humble and made us to be the same. In his image we were designed and back to his side we are called again and again.

So have heart. We know how to live. Such blessing is in us all. Justice, mercy and humility are ours to inhabit and share if only we’d kneel before our God and, instead of pleading our case or offering trite excuses as offerings, we admit to God, to self and to one another that we have lost our case on our own and submit ourselves to God and God alone. So that all just works, mercies and kindnesses are done in him rather than for ourselves. So that the mountains, hills, valleys and rivers will rejoice, our broken relationships and hearts mended, our hearts turned to the other and our lives marked by justice, steadfast love and humility. Friends if God is our heart, justice our life and humility our guide – we can and will help God heal this beautiful and broken world.