

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 29th January 2023

prepared by the Revd Kate Cambridge

Today in our worship we will be using some verses from the prophet Micah to help us think about what is important in our lives and how we can please God in our worship. I invite you to prayerfully read through and reflect on these short verses as we begin worship.

‘He 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?’ (Micah 6.8)

Listen, read, pray or sing along (STF 55)

[Immortal, invisible, God only wise- YouTube](#)

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible, hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;
Thy justice, like mountains, high soaring above
Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and
love.

To all, life Thou givest, to both great and small;
In all life Thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish, but naught changeth
Thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;
All praise we would render; oh, help us to see
’Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee.

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908)

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Ancient of Days, Almighty God, Father of all,
you are our light and our life.
In you we live and move and have our being.
Still our hearts today as we worship you.

When we feel overwhelmed by darkness,
shine on us the light of your love.
Where we are blinded to your presence, open
our eyes to see you and our hearts to know you.

In the light of your presence Lord,
we see too clearly our own faults and failings,
the selfish, unkind or hateful thoughts in our
hearts, our self-centredness and greed.

Nothing is hidden from you Lord.
And so, in the quiet of this moment, we invite
you in, asking for your forgiveness, waiting the
renewing power of your Spirit and longing once
again to walk closely with you.

(Take a moment of silence to sit honestly in God’s
presence and bring your own confession.)

‘ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive
ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess
our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us
our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’
(1 John 1.8-9)

Let us hear again God’s gracious word to us: Our
sins are forgiven; thanks be to God. Amen.

Read Micah 6.1-8

Read Matthew 5.1-12

We have heard challenging words from both
Micah and Jesus about how we are to live our
lives as disciples. This next hymn reminds us that
we need to be filled with God’s Spirit as we
journey with God – we do not walk alone. I invite
you to use it as a prayer.

Listen, read, pray or sing along (STF 370)

[Breathe on me, breath of God - YouTube](#)

- 1 Breathe on me, Breath of God;
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love,
and do what thou wouldst do.
- 2 Breathe on me, Breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until with thee I will one will,
to do and to endure.
- 3 Breathe on me, Breath of God,
till I am wholly thine,
until this earthly part of me
glows with thy fire divine.

4 Breathe on me, Breath of God;
so shall I never die,
but live with thee the perfect life
of thine eternity.

Edwin Hatch (1835-1889)

Or for a reflective version of this hymn to listen to, why not try [Breathe On Me, Breath Of God - YouTube](#)

Reflection

Micah is known as one of the Minor Prophets in the Bible, yet the words from this small book have a big impact. When Jimmy Carter was inaugurated as President of the United States in January 1977, he took his oath of office on a Bible open at Micah 6.8 and he quoted some of the words we have read today:

'He 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?' (Micah 6.8)

It is a small book (only 7 chapters) but deals with the big themes of justice, peace and the coming of the Messiah. The passage today begins the third of the three sections in Micah, which each begin with the words 'hear'.

Chapter 6 reads like a case being brought before a court of law; the Lord brings his case against his people Israel. He summons the mountains and hills, and even the earth's foundations, to hear the case that he brings. God, who sent Moses and led his people out of Egypt and across the Jordan, asks how he has wearied his people. Their ingratitude and rebellion against God is clear. All is not well with their relationship.

In answer to the Lord's charge, someone speaks on behalf of the people. What would be an appropriate response? What can they bring as they come before the Lord their God in worship? Burnt offerings were sacrifices where the whole animal was offered to God and consumed in the fire – as they could be offered at 8 days old, a year-old calf would be an expensive sacrifice but possible. Thousands of rams is a less realistic sacrifice, but King David and Solomon are said to

have brought such extravagant offerings (1 Chronicles 29.21). However, tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Really? The story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 made clear that God does not want human sacrifices, despite the practices of some of the nations around Israel.

So, what would be an acceptable offering to God? What could they – can we – do to please God? What can we bring? The answer is not *what* to bring but *who*. God wants those who worship him to bring themselves and their lives – and reveals the way they should live as God's people.

'He 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?'

Do justice.

The prophets had a lot to say about justice. The prophet Amos wrote, 'Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.' (Amos 5.24). Both prophets spoke to a people who were failing to act justly; the powerful oppressed the powerless (2.1-2;8-9), labourers were exploited (3.10) and the courts were corrupt (3.11).

We do not have to look far today to see injustice and inequality in our world; where those with disabilities and on lower incomes cannot afford to heat their homes, where more and more people need the help of the local food bank, where the rich get richer while many cannot afford to live on the wages they are paid and seek a fairer share. Locally as well as globally, many people are discriminated against because of who they are or where they come from, how they identify, often simply because they are perceived as different from others. Climate change adversely impacts poorer nations much more than more affluent ones, often the highest polluters. What does it mean, then, to 'do justice' today?

In 2021 the Methodist Church launched a two-year project called '*Walking with Micah: Methodist Principles for Social Justice*'. The

Methodist Church has a history of challenging injustice and the project seeks to draw on this and to learn from the insights and challenges of those both within and beyond the Christian faith. There have been consultations across the Methodist Church and at Conference this year, the project will report back on principles, priorities and practices and consider how we can support leaders, the Joint Public Issues team and local Methodists to work for social justice. If you are on the internet, you can find more resources on the Methodist Church website by searching 'walking with Micah.' I hope we will be able to look at this further and learn more after Conference – because justice is a huge issue and it is not always clear how we can act to tackle injustice, locally and globally. What is clear is that words are not enough – if we worship every Sunday and know the right words to say, but do not act – 'do justice' – then what is our worship really worth?

Love kindness.

Last week the prime minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, quit ahead of this year's election. After steering the country through the Covid 19 pandemic, recession, the Christchurch mosque shootings and the White Island volcanic eruption, Ms Ardern said that she no longer had 'enough in the tank' to lead. But she said that she hoped her legacy in New Zealand would be 'as someone who always tried to be kind.' You may remember some of the news reports from New Zealand at times of disaster -and the compassion she showed for the people she stood alongside.

When announcing her resignation, Ms Ardern said, 'I hope I leave New Zealanders with a belief that you can be kind, but strong, empathetic but decisive, optimistic but focused. And that you can be your own kind of leader – one who knows when it's time to go.' Love kindness.

The Hebrew word translated 'kindness', *hesed*, is rich in meaning and can in fact be translated in many different ways. Some translations read 'love mercy.' *Hesed* can portray the steadfast love between a husband and wife, between friends, or

between humankind and God. It is about love and loyalty – we respond to the steadfast love of God with loyal devotion to God and loving service to our neighbour. Ms Ardern stood out on the world stage because her way of leadership was seen as different to so many – loyalty, kindness, compassion – all while being a strong and decisive leader. In a world where many people seem content to gain at the expense of others, where looking good is often achieved through putting down others, what does it mean to love kindness?

Walk humbly with your God.

I wonder what it means to walk humbly with God? Certainly Jesus shows us what it is to be humble; Jesus, who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, humbled himself and was obedient to death, even death on the cross (Philippians 2.6-8). The one who came not to be served but to serve, shows us a different way to live, looking not always to our own needs but to the needs of others. In Matthew 5.5, Jesus said, '*blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*'

However, the word 'humbly' in this passage in Micah has more of the sense of walking carefully – the NEB translation says 'wisely'. The emphasis in this phrase is actually on 'walking' with God. The whole orientation of our lives should be God-focused. In Judaism the word for ethics is *halacha* – which means 'walking'. To talk about Christian ethics is to talk about how we ought to walk through day to day life. Jesus did not tell his disciples when he called them to 'believe in me', but to 'walk' or 'follow me.'

How are we then to please God when we come before him? In our worship, is it the style of our music (we all have our own ideas about the right way to worship), the offerings of money that we bring (an important part of our expression of our faith and commitment), the passion of our singing and fervent prayer? How challenging to realise that it is not about what we can bring during times of worship – but that we honour

God and live faithfully when we offer our whole lives to him.

Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with your God. May God grant us the wisdom that we need and empower us by the Spirit to make these words real in our lives, individually and as we walk together faithfully as God's people. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Gracious God, you are a God of justice and yet in your world we see so much injustice. We long for a world where all have what they need, where your blessings are shared, where all are treated with respect and their voices heard. O Lord, raise up leaders who will work for justice and peace; bless those organisations and individuals who speak out courageously against injustice; help us too to know what it means, as individuals and as the Methodist people, to walk with Micah and to seek justice for all.

Merciful God, you are a faithful God; even when we turn away from you, your love for us remains constant. We pray for those who have not known the love and kindness of others; for those living in abusive relationships, for children who suffer from abuse or neglect, for all who feel unloved and unlovable. May we have confidence and wisdom in supporting those in need. Show us what it means to be kind and to be steadfast in showing your love to others.

Companion God, throughout our lives, you invite us to walk with you and to follow the way of Jesus. Through your Spirit, you equip us to be faithful disciples. In a world where many seek power and influence, show us what it means to walk humbly with you, to be a friend of Jesus and to serve others as you have served us. We offer to you the gifts that we bring, of money, time and talent, and with them the gift of ourselves. May we honour you with our lives as we journey with you, our Lord, our master, our friend.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come, thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along (STF 713)

[Show me how to stand for justice - YouTube](#)

Show me how to stand for justice:

how to work for what is right,
how to challenge false assumptions,
how to walk within the light.

May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
showing your immense compassion
by the life I choose to lead.

Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
whether given or received –
for my need has not diminished
since the day I first believed:
let me seek no satisfaction
boasting of what I have done,
but rejoice that I am pardoned
and accepted in your Son.

Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
modelled on your living word,
in humility submitting
to the truth which I have heard.
Make me conscious of your presence
every day in all I do:
by your Spirit's gracious prompting
may I learn to walk with you.

Martin Leckebusch (b. 1962)

Closing Blessing

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us in the coming days, as we seek to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with our faithful God. Amen.

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