

Wayside Presbyterian Church

02.10.19

What does God require?

On Saturday, I will go before my Presbytery and proclaim my faith statement and my faith journey. I am hoping to be accepted as a Candidate for Ordination, the last step before being ready to receive a call. In the last couple of weeks, I have been writing my faith statement and my journey of faith to turn in for the Presbytery meeting. It has gotten me thinking about what God is truly requiring from us as humanity. And what we truly believe about who God is and who we are as God's chosen people.

It brings me back to our scripture for today, from the book of Micah, chapter 6, verses 6-8 and I am reading from the New Revised Standard Version, listen now for the Word of the Lord:

**6** "With what shall I come before the Lord,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
**7** Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"  
**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 mercy,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

I believe the entirety of our faith in God can be boiled down to this message. Even in our Bibles, this passage is labeled as "What God Requires". And the point of this passage is to be exaggerating. The point is to sound like humanity is being required

ONLY to do these three things. But before these, we hear 3 options of what could be offered to God.

The first thing offered to God is “burnt offerings, with a calf of a year old.” However, in Isaiah 1:11, God calls out the people and clearly states that They do not want these things:

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?

says the Lord;

I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams

and the fat of fed beasts;

I do not delight in the blood of bulls,

or of lambs, or of goats” (Isaiah 1:11).

The suggestions of what to bring before God get more and more ridiculous as they go on. Starting with burnt offerings, and ending with human sacrifice, the possibilities of presenting them to God are more and more sarcastic. The acts are meant to be more and more dramatic. The burnt offerings suggested would leave nothing left for the worshippers, it would all be dedicated to God. The rams and oil are referenced in Leviticus 9:1-4 which says: “On the eighth day Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. **2** He said to Aaron, “Take a bull calf for your sin offering and a ram for your burnt offering, both without defect, and present them before the Lord. **3** Then say to the Israelites: ‘Take a male goat for a sin offering, a calf and a lamb—both a year old and without defect—for a burnt offering, **4** and an ox and a ram for a fellowship offering to sacrifice before the Lord, together with a grain offering mixed with olive oil. For today the Lord will appear to you.’” but Micah’s listeners are being sarcastic, they don’t truly believe they will be giving these things for offerings to God. And finally, as a pinnacle of human delusion, the spokesman of humanity proposes to offer his son, his firstborn. Saying: “Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

The use of the phrase “the fruit of my body, for the sin of my soul,” is uncommon in the Hebrew Bible. This completes the last sarcastic suggestion of what to bring God

when bowing before God. Instead of these giant things, that would be impossible to present to God, God is simply asking us to be humble and to love justice and to walk humbly. Micah ignores these outlandish suggestions and continues to state what God has required of humanity. Our scripture clearly says,

God has told you, O mortal, what is good;

and what does the Lord require of you

but to do justice, and to love mercy,

and to walk humbly with your God?

What do these things mean though? First, we are called to “do justice.” This seems like a giant requirement. However, it may be much simpler than it sounds. There is a huge call for social justice right now. This call comes from all sides of every line, which is the unifying part of all of it. God is asking us to treat people as if they were our siblings, our children, our parents. God is asking us to fight for justice for all people and to care about people. Isaiah 1:17 says, “learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” and John 6:37 says, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven;” There is justice called for throughout the Bible. But what does this mean for us right now?

When we witness injustice, we are called to fight it. This is easy to explain to kids. For example, if you see one of your classmates playing with some blocks, and you see another classmate come over and knock those blocks down, and run away. What do you do? Of course, the “correct answer” is that we hope the child we are talking to would stand up, help their classmate whose blocks fell down, and tell the other classmate who knocked them down that it wasn’t nice, and they should say sorry. This call gets more difficult as we get older. We have strong opinions on the lines of social justice and what each issue means for us. However, the call is no different. It is important that we continue to fight for those that can not fight for themselves. It is our call to stand with those that need people to stand with them. We are called to do justice in this world.

Our second call is to “love mercy.” This call isn’t quite asking us to just be kind to others. Though this verse can also be translated to “love kindness” rather than love mercy, and that may be what you’ve heard often when this verse has been read. However, the Hebrew word is “חֶסֶד” (hesed). It is translated as mercy about 100 more times than kindness. The phrase “loving mercy” expresses a sense of not only loving other people but the community as a whole. Since God has chosen the outsider and the alien to be God’s own people like in Deuteronomy 10:15 which says “yet the Lord set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today,” because this is true, we must practice a loving kindness and mercy toward all people as well.

It is consistently important to both the prophets of the Hebrew Bible and to God that the country of Israel were strangers in their land just like other people and groups they are encountering. Often Israel is scolded and challenged for their treatment of the “alien” in their land. In fact, the phrase: “love mercy” implies a type of covenant with other people. In this concept, there is the implied connection of being siblings and being specifically connected to each other.

In our current context, this may look a bit different than what Micah foresaw when he prophesied to humanity. But truly, it may be required that we look back to what Micah would have actually meant. To love mercy speaks to seeing the good in people and not blaming others for things they can’t control. To love mercy means to turn the other cheek when we are slapped or hurt by others. To love mercy is to value relationships over differences in each other.

We will find people who differ from us in every context we find ourselves in. Even at school, at a seminary affiliated with the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, not all students are PC(USA) students. I find people I disagree with all the time. Students in my classes disagree about infant baptism, students disagree about LGBTQ inclusion in worship, some even disagree about women preaching and being involved in worship. However, no matter what we disagree on, we are still a community.

There is still the expectation that we put that community before our differences. Let me tell you though, it isn't an easy task. It takes intentional work every day.

Our last call from this passage is to "walk humbly with our God." This call is the only one to connect the will of God to humanity directly. We are not asked to walk alongside God, we are not asked to wander around while God calls to us. We are called directly to walk humbly with God. This phrase doesn't actually mean to physically walk however, it means to "live in community with." So what God is actually asking us here is to humbly live in community with God.

When walking with God and living in that community, the other two commands come together. The three combined create a life that God has required of us. We are better able to do justice for others and to love mercy when we walk closely with God. It is important to follow these calls because God has told us these things specifically in a way to walk closer with God. In this passage, God has had enough with the sarcastic offers from humans, God has given clear instructions on how to behave toward other people. And finally, God requires nothing more from humanity than what God has provided and done for humanity as well.

Today, we see this call most clearly when we are asked to find God in our day to day lives. Lately, I have been asked to practice mindfulness and spend time working on finding God throughout my days. It is difficult, but worth it every day. It's been interesting though. There was never a time where I would have said that God wasn't in my everyday life, however, when specifically searching for those signs, they appear everywhere. It is important that we pay attention to those signs and spend time interacting with God in response to them.

In the Bible, we find clear examples of times that God has done justice for humanity. God is one who fights for God's chosen people, God seems to break down boundaries that are in the way of Israel and God advocates for those who can not speak for themselves. We see this constantly throughout all the prophets. The book of Amos, chapter 2 is a complete chapter based on God's requirement of Justice in Israel. Throughout the Bible, consistently, God has been merciful and graceful with humanity

and has loved us through being in a community with us. God has sought us out. We are being called to be in a community not only with each other but with God as well. This passage proves it.

If we were only called to be in a community with God, and not worry about each other or spend time caring for humanity, the passage would only speak toward walking humbly with God. However, the other two calls that are expected of us are to do justice for others and love mercy. These calls are specific and intentional. We can not do one or two of them without doing all three. Our graceful, loving, God has called us to these things because we are God's holy and chosen people. If we all fell in line and completed these calls- our World would seem to be a better place that had each of us fighting for and standing with each other, no matter what divided or separated us. And truly, that seems like a better World for all people.

Please pray with me,

Graceful, loving, and humble God-

You have told us what you require of us, and we have been sarcastic in our reply. We have not listened as you stated what you need and want from humanity, and we are actively fighting against your calls. Help us, God, and stay with us consistently to remind us of your true calls to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with you. In all your knowledge and grace, may we find your will in this World, and work to bring Heaven and Earth together.

In your name,

Amen.