

CHURCH OF THE PALMS, Sarasota FL

November 9, 2014

SERMON “WALKING HUMBLY” Dr. Hmingi Browne

Testimonial Stories of just and kind people walking humbly with God

We continue on the sermon series of God’s Story and our Story. We have moved past the time of the early Kings – David and Solomon. We skipped past the Kingdom getting split into Israel and Judah. We advance to a time when the people – especially the leaders and city dwellers – seem to have forgotten God’s great deeds on their behalf. They have forgotten that God is a jealous God and that God judges the people on their treatment of the widows, orphans, poor and strangers. Corruption is wide-spread. Justice is for sale.

The prophet Micah is commissioned by God to warn the people that God knows their evil and that the kingdoms are in danger of being punished with defeat because they have turned away from God. Within 25 years Israel falls to the Assyrians and 150 years later Judah falls to the Babylonians. Micah warns the people of God’s coming punishment. And, he offers a vision of how good it would be if the people were faithful and obedient to the God who brought them out of Egypt and gave them the land of Canaan.

Prophet Micah tells them that pleasing God is not complex. He 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 kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

These three actions – **doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God** - are the heart of what God requires. They are not debatable. They are what God has told us is **good**. They fit together like the three legs of a three-legged stool. Each is necessary. Each provides balance to the other two. The question is not what shall we do? – that has been answered! Rather the question is, **“how shall we live justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God?”**

Many people have taught me how to live as Micah directs. I'd like to tell you about two of them.

Bill Leety was my first mentor in ministry. He is a pastor who loves the city and the people in it. Bill loves justice. He sees justice as equal access to those things that led to a full and joyous life in God.

Bill is not given to anger. But, if someone – even within the church – tries to limit someone else's access to the means of God's grace, Bill can be ferocious. Bill's **doing of justice** is keeping clear and equal the avenues of access to life. Bill believes that what Jesus said in John chapter 10 verse 10 applies to absolutely everyone, **"I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly!"**

When I come around recruit you to participate in any ministry, I want you to know I am **doing you justice**. I am giving everyone equal access to the opportunity to find fullness of life and joy in being disciples in the service of Christ. Isn't that kind of me?

I was fortunate to also have as a mentor a Parish Nurse by the name of Sue Mooney. She was a professor of nursing and sat on boards and was the moderator of the Presbytery. She was a person full of joy who was intensely interested in who people were and how they were doing. She was for me the embodiment of a person that **loved kindness**. Sue taught me how to visit those who couldn't care well for themselves.

One time, within my first three months of being a pastor, we went to visit an elderly lady who had soiled her bed. The lady was embarrassed. Sue was not. She just walked in talking and laughing. She asked me to do the dirty dishes in the sink. Talking and laughing all the while, she washed her up. We changed her clothes. We remade her bed with fresh linen and put the soiled linen in the washer. Sue's words and actions drove the awareness of disgrace right out of the room. When the lady was clean and securely back in bed, Sue said, "Ethel (not her real name), you look so good. Now I want you to meet Hmingi our new Associate Pastor. She is a really good person and I know that because she is short like me."

I learned from Sue Mooney that **“loving kindness”** means never letting anything blind us to the humanity of those we encounter. It means seeing that people – at every moment of their lives - are made in the image and likeness of God. And it means that we are called to do everything we can to help them live a full and joyous life in safety and health and sufficiency and dignity. In John 15:12 Jesus gives his new commandment, saying, **“Love one another as I have loved you.”** In loving kindness we don’t only serve those in need, we love and serve God. As Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, **“Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.”**

As I think about people who walk humbly with God I realize that the people I think of are far from weak and mild. Think about the truly humble people you know. When we look at these people we see people who are in awe of what God is doing in the world! They are amazed and grateful that they get to be some small part of that. Humble people of faith are ultimately people of joy and confidence. They are ‘doers’ and ‘enthusiastic proclaimers’ – not of their own goodness – but of the goodness and love and grace of God.

Humble people are not proud, arrogant or rude. They are loving people. I realize I have begun to describe what 1st Corinthians 13:4-7 tells us love is. See if you don’t think this substitution works: **“⁴Humble people are patient; humble people are kind; humble people are not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. Humble people do not insist on their own way; they are not irritable or resentful; ⁶humble people do not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoice in the truth. ⁷Humble people bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things.”**

Mahatma Gandhi taught us non-violence is not passivity. The Prophet Micah tells us that to walk with God requires humility. It is not an invitation. It is a requirement.

The Prophet Micah still speaks to us today and tells us that pleasing God is not complex.

“God has told us, what is good; and what does the Lord require of us but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God?”

In doing these, we follow and serve the God of all power as God reshapes all of human life and history. God is loving, strong and gentle. We are to be the same. Amen.

CHARGE

Go in Peace.

Doing Justice

Loving Kindness and

Walking Humbly with your God

BENEDICTION

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.