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Abington Presbyterian Church

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Micah 6:6-8

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

## FAITH AND HUMILITY

There is a story from some years ago back when Poland was still under Communist rule. The queen of Belgium was visiting there and everywhere she went, she was accompanied by Polish government security. Since she was Catholic, she attended mass. On one occasion, while she was kneeling in prayer, she noticed that the guard standing beside her was moving his lips and saying the prayers. She asked him, "Are you a Catholic?" to which he responded, "I believe, but I don't practice." She asked, "Are you a Communist?" to which he answered, "I practice, but I don't believe." <sup>1</sup>

We are in the midst of a sermon series where we are exploring how to practice what we believe and to believe what we practice. Today we focus on faith and humility. During this focus on faith and related topics, we've seen that an active faith entails boldly stepping out to live out our beliefs. But one of the main scriptural summaries of how to live out one's faith from the prophet Micah, which we heard earlier, says we are to walk humbly with our God. How do we live out a faith that is both bold and humble?

Perhaps there was no one as bold in living out his faith in the early church as was the Apostle Paul. He risked his life going to places he had never been, to preach to people he had never met, because of his vibrant faith in Jesus Christ. Paul was imprisoned numerous times, resulting from his brash way of preaching the gospel and challenging authorities. Tradition tells us that he ultimately was martyred for his Christian faith.

In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote about not being able to see clearly what lies before us, a reason for us to seek to walk humbly with God in our faith journey. We move forward not always seeing clearly where God is calling us to go, but still we are called to step out trusting that God will show us what we need to

see. Beyond this life, Paul tells us we will see God and the divine intent face to face, but for now, we know only in part.

Therefore, it's not always clear what God's will is for us as a faith community or for us as individuals or society. There is quite a variety of viewpoints from people of faith on various issues, which can lead us to a certain humility regarding our convictions. However, some things are clearly not God's will. When horrendous mass killings took place last weekend in El Paso and in Dayton, after a long line of violent, hate-filled acts, various crowds began chanting, expressing their frustration and fear, telling various political figures, "Do something, do something!"<sup>2</sup>

We are told in Micah's wonderful three phrase statement that what God requires of us first is for us to do justice. Upon hearing that, it becomes clear that God stands against injustice in our land and in our world. God also stands against us standing on the sidelines – we, not just someone else, are called to do justice, or if we can't do justice directly ourselves in particular circumstances, then we are to work for it. Some would indicate that the church needs to stay neutral on justice issues because such things can be too messy. Yet, Desmond Tutu, who served as an Anglican archbishop in South Africa as apartheid was being overcome, has often said, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If a (large animal) has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."<sup>3</sup> We are called to do justice.

Micah says that secondly, we are to love kindness. That's quite different from calling upon us to love privilege or prestige or money. The call to love kindness makes it clear that expressions of hatred in word or action are not in keeping with God's good will, whether that hatred is based on race or immigration status or political party. As a person of bold faith and action, the Apostle Paul wrote that even powerful faith that could do miraculous things, but that lacked love, would demonstrate nothing more than spiritual bankruptcy. We are called to act lovingly and kindly toward those with whom we disagree, toward those who don't act lovingly toward us, and toward everyone else. It is more than what we do that is important – how we go about what we do and for what reason is very important for us as people of faith.

Adan Mairena is a friend of this congregation. He is pastor of West Kensington Ministry, with whom APC partners in ministry in a very needy part of Philadelphia. He has been a worship leader here and was a part of my installation service here. Adan was born in Honduras, but came early in life to this country and went to high school in El Paso. So last weekend, when Hispanics were targeted in a killing spree at a mall where he used to hang out with his friends, it was an unsettling experience for him. From a Facebook post of his, these are part of the thoughts he shared: “to come to terms that people hate us Hispanics this much and that we can be hunted down like animals is numbing. In a different way now I relate to Native Americans who were hunted down as their land was stolen, African Americans who lived during lynchings, Matthew Shepard and LGBTQ people, Asian people who were thrown into concentration camps... this list can sadly go on and on.”<sup>4</sup> Such a post helps us to see that there are many people who need our loving kindness even as we pursue justice for them and for all of God’s beloved.

And then the third phrase in our Micah passage - when we are called to walk humbly with God, it is clear, that going our own way with our own arrogance or bravado is not what is called for by God or by the situation we face. We have every reason for humility as we see the challenges before us and recognize that we as a people have gotten things wrong in the past, and we get tired, get off track, get distracted, and lose perspective. And yet, as a result of who we in humility get to walk with, the God who makes a way out of no way, who brings forth life and resurrection life, then we can be confident and excited about what God will be doing in partnership with us. It is not a faithful humility that informs us that we won’t ever accomplish anything. By God’s grace, by God’s power, in God’s time, we can expect to see wondrous things along the way, as long as we keep walking with God.

If we are looking for an example of bold humility or humble boldness, we can look to Jesus. He acted boldly because he was shaped by God’s love. Expressing love, he crossed boundaries normally not crossed. He reached out to the outcasts, the poor, the weak, and the sick. He challenged religious and political authorities. He shook up the status quo because love demanded it. He also acted in humility because he was shaped by God’s love. He washed his followers’ feet. He listened

to those to whom no one else listened. In reliance upon God, he did not store up possessions. He constantly sought God's will. Even when he did not clearly see where to go next, he went where God's love directed him. It was the kind of love the Apostle Paul described as patient and kind; love that was not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude; love that did not insist on its own way; love that was not irritable or resentful; that did not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoiced in the truth; bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things." That's the kind of love that seeks justice for others while humbly relying on God as the source of our strength.

St. Francis was also a model for faith and humility. There has come to be called a Franciscan benediction, which reflects Franciscan belief and practice, which spells out guidance for us as we seek to walk humbly with God:

May God bless us with discomfort

At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships

So that we may live from deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with anger

At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of God's creations

So that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with tears

To shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war,

So that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and

To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with just enough foolishness

To believe that we can make a difference in the world,

So that we can do what others claim cannot be done:

To bring justice and kindness to all our children and all our neighbors who are poor.<sup>5</sup>

Such blessings are different from what we might normally envision. But it is a blessed life to live in faith and humility, believing and practicing, accompanied by God. May that be our path!

<sup>1</sup> Told in a sermon by Daniel Vestal attributing the story to Os Guinness. The sermon is found at [http://day1.org/484-a\\_rediscovery\\_of\\_biblical\\_religion](http://day1.org/484-a_rediscovery_of_biblical_religion)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/05/748239149/do-something-calls-ring-out-after-mass-shootings-in-el-paso-and-dayton>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/may/23/interview-desmond-tutu> Archbishop Tutu actually identifies the large animal as an elephant – elephant imagery that gets used in the U.S. led me to be more general at this time

<sup>4</sup> Facebook post, August 4, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> <https://brianmclaren.net/a-franciscan-benediction/>