WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of October 2, 2022

Weekly Prayer
Loving God, you are the one who calls us into community with each other to love and work, to support and heal. You call us into community with all people; to bring justice, kindness and humility in all that we do. Fill my heart, fill my eyes, fill my ears with Your love, that I might share Your love with others. Amen.

Monday, October 3

Scripture: Micah 6:6-8
With what should I approach the LORD
and bow down before God on high?
Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings,
with year-old calves?
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with many torrents of oil?
Should I give my oldest child for my crime;
the fruit of my body for the sin of my spirit?
He has told you, human one, what is good and
what the LORD requires from you:
to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.

Observation
The prophet Micah spoke to the kingdom of Judah's urge to keep religious ritual and "conspicuous consumption" side-by-side. On God's behalf, he urged a different agenda: "Do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God." At Messiah Church, we serve the same God as Micah did and agree that pious rituals matter less than simply treating people justly.

Application
In what ways do your culture and community fall short of doing justice, embracing faithful love, and walking humbly with God? Micah's delineation of God's requirements includes no negative statements about what is forbidden to the Israelites. It presents a positive case of what God thinks is best for humankind. How can you actively move yourself, your family, your workplace, and your community toward God's best for humankind?

Prayer
Lord Jesus, my goal is to walk humbly with you. Lead and guide me into the newness of life that you died and rose again to offer me. Amen.

Tuesday, October 4

Scriptures: Isaiah 58:2-10, James 2:8, 14-17
They seek me day after day,
desiring knowledge of my ways
like a nation that acted righteously,
that didn't abandon their God.
They ask me for righteous judgments,
wanting to be close to God.
"Why do we fast and you don't see;
why afflict ourselves and you don't notice?"
Yet on your fast day you do whatever you want,
and oppress all your workers.
You quarrel and brawl, and then you fast;
you hit each other violently with your fists.
You shouldn't fast as you are doing today
if you want to make your voice heard on high.
Is this the kind of fast I choose,
a day of self-affliction,
of bending one's head like a reed
and of lying down in mourning clothing and ashes?
Is this what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?
Isn't this the fast I choose:
releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke,
setting free the mistreated,
and breaking every yoke?
Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry
and bringing the homeless poor into your house,
covering the naked when you see them,
and not hiding from your own family?
Then your light will break out like the dawn,
and you will be healed quickly.
Your own righteousness will walk before you,
and the LORD's glory will be your rear guard.
Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
you will cry for help, and God will say, "I'm here."
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the finger-pointing, the wicked speech;
if you open your heart to the hungry,

and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted,
your light will shine in the darkness,
and your gloom will be like the noon.

You do well when you really fulfill the royal law found in scripture, *Love your neighbor as yourself.*

My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can't save anyone, can it? Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. What if one of you said, "Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!"? What good is it if you don't actually give them what their body needs? In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn't result in faithful activity.

Observation
Isaiah 58 likely spoke to the Israelites returned from exile in Babylon. Too many of them saw the return as a time to resume "business as usual," and wondered why God didn't honor their feasts and fasts. Like Amos and Micah 150 years earlier, the prophet said that instead of showy, external fasts, they needed to "fast" from oppressing others. Jesus' brother James saw that some early Christians had the same spiritual problem. A "faith" unwilling to actively help struggling people, he wrote, is no faith at all.

Application
James wasn't suggesting a good "balance" between faith and works, as though we need a 50/50 mix of the two. We need 100% of both—100% merciful actions growing out of 100% faith in God's gracious acceptance of us, for which we show gratitude. What are some of the faithful actions in loving your neighbor(s) you have seen grow in your life as you respond to God's grace?

Prayer
O God, I want to live a life that honors and pleases you. Help me to offer you my heart, my inner being, before I offer you anything else. Guide me today and each day. Amen.

Wednesday, October 5

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:9-15
You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although he was rich, he became poor for your sakes, so that you could become rich through his poverty. I'm giving you my opinion about this. It's to your advantage to do this, since you not only started to do it last year but you wanted to do it too. Now finish the job as well so that you finish it with as much enthusiasm as you started, given what you can afford. A gift is appreciated because of what a person can afford, not because of what that person can't afford, if it's apparent that it's done willingly. It isn't that we want others to have financial ease and you financial difficulties, but it's a matter of equality. At the present moment, your surplus can fill their deficit so that in the future their surplus can fill your deficit. In this way there is

equality. As it is written, *The one who gathered more didn't have too much, and the one who gathered less didn't have too little.*

Observation
Christ followers didn't only bridge ethnic or gender divides. In a world with wide gaps between the privileged wealthy and the abused poor, they also reached across economic divides. Paul took up a collection from areas where people were prospering to help Christians in Jerusalem suffering from poverty. He saw Christ's ideal for God's people as the opposite of "class warfare." Christ's example called for deep-seated mutual concern and burden-sharing.

Application
At the end of this passage, Paul referred to the story of the Israelites receiving manna to feed them in the wilderness (Exodus 16:15-18). Every Israelite, Exodus said, gathered only as much manna (food) as they needed. No one tried to "corner the market." Is there a principle in that story that applies to life today? Do you believe Paul's goal of equality is out of date in the 21st century, or worth seeking to seriously live out?

Prayer
Lord Jesus, I find the word "mine" so appealing, but it can make me grasp the assets you give me in trust much too tightly. Teach me how to keep growing into your spirit of generosity. Amen.

Thursday, October 6

Scripture: James 3:17-18
What of the wisdom from above? First, it is pure, and then peaceful, gentle, obedient, filled with mercy and good actions, fair, and genuine. Those who make peace sow the seeds of justice by their peaceful acts.

Observation
James returned to an agricultural image to sum up this wisdom about how to use our speech. Moral action is described in the agricultural terms of sowing and reaping (see Proverbs 22:8; 1 Corinthians 9:11; Galatians 6:7-8). Justice is the outcome of the actions of those who make peace. This is a reminder of Jesus' saying, "Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God's children" (Matthew 5:9). Jesus refused the siren call of violence, as sounded both by Rome and the zealots who hated Rome. In the end, his influence on leaders like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. (and millions of less famous followers) did more to bring about justice than all the violent movements in his day and since.

Application
Scholar N. T. Wright wrote a stirring challenge: "These characteristics are hard to acquire and hard to maintain. They only appear where there has been a steady habit of prayer and

self-discipline; even then they may take a while to show. It would be worth spending the time to work through the words in this list [verse 17] one by one. Do it slowly. Review your life in the light of them. Suppose some of the people you meet every day were like the people in verse 16, and others like the people in verse 17. Which one would you rather see coming towards you down the street? Which would you rather have as a neighbor? The challenge is how to become that neighbor yourself. And once more the answer is this. Wisdom comes from above. Pray for it. Persevere. Will you accept the challenge?"

Prayer
Loving Jesus, your love, then and now, can look impossibly soft and naïve. Give me a clear view of history, of the ways your love has defeated violence and hate over and over. Give me the courage to live out your love. Amen.

Friday, October 7

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-3
Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and his disciples came to him. He taught them, saying:
"Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Observation
Jesus didn't preach the Sermon on the Mount just once, and then move on. Scholar William Barclay noted that the Greek verb translated "taught" describes "repeated and habitual action," and the translation should be: 'This is what he used to teach them.' Matthew's gospel grouped Jesus' teachings into five great sermons (5:1-7:29; 9:35-11:1; 13:2-52; 18:1-35; and 24:1-25:46). Today's passage began the first of those sermons.

Application
Jesus' words may seem strange, since he regards as 'happy people' those who are usually regarded as unfortunate. This alerts us to the topsy-turvy nature of Jesus' teaching. 'Hopeless' (or 'poor in spirit') refers to those who continue to look to God for help in the midst of their present, needy state. What helps you keep looking to God during this time of pre-election, post-pandemic and social disruption?

Prayer
Lord Jesus, somehow your "topsy-turvy" teaching seems particularly fitting for this topsy-turvy time I'm living through. Help me to grasp and hold onto the wonderful news you came to share. Amen.

Saturday, October 8

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-24
The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But it is the power of God for those of us who are being saved. It is written in scripture: *I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will reject the intelligence of the intelligent*. Where are the wise? Where are the legal experts? Where are today's debaters? Hasn't God made the wisdom of the world foolish? In God's wisdom, he determined that the world wouldn't come to know him through its wisdom. Instead, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching. Jews ask for signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, which is a scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those who are called—both Jews and Greeks—Christ is God's power and God's wisdom.

Observation
The apostle Paul knew his central message was "foolish" to some and "scandalous" to others. He knew no PR person or mythmaker would try to impress Greeks, Romans or Hebrews with a crucified savior. Yet he preached Christ crucified as a life-changing physical and spiritual fact with utter conviction. He relied on God's power, not sheer human logic, to change people's lives and thinking. He trusted that God's wisdom and strength were greater than this world's and found that they are.

Application
Imagine you went to hear a great concert pianist. The pianist entered in handcuffs—what?—but then played superbly with nose and chin. Impossible, right? That's a crude image of what many people would think when Paul said the Jesus the Romans crucified was the world's Savior and Lord. Saving the world through the cross defied (and still does) most human ideas about power. In what surprising ways has God's saving power shaped your life? The lives of others you know?

Prayer
Dear God, I am grateful that your strength and wisdom are greater than the world's! I need that—I can't save myself. Help me to trust and depend on you for what I need most. Amen.