

Be Just. Be Kind. Be Humble.: 3. Be Humble
Michah 6:8; Matthew 5:1-12
October 16, 2022
Pastor Bethany Nelson

There was a woman, who made prayer a very important part of her life. And one day, she turned to God and said: *Thank you God for your guidance. I have managed today to be kind, to be just, and to be humble. You have been faithfully present to me, and I think you. But now, I'm going to get out of bed – and I'll really need your help!*

I've heard many stories this week of opportunities God has laid upon your hearts for kindness, or places where you have witnessed the kindness of others. Thank you for sharing these stories with me, and for the ways you're continuing to *pay attention* to the ways God is at work in and around you.

One of the reasons we've gathered with other congregations around this series, is because we believe that we can deepen our impact by joining with others to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly. And I love the image that there are thousands of Christians, just like you and me, around our country focusing their prayers and actions in this way during these weeks.

Today, we turn our attention to the final command given in Micah 6:8... and as I mentioned last week, it just might be the most difficult of the three: walk humbly with God. And I think, at least for me, it's a command that feels startling. When I hear Micah's words: Do justice! I think, "Yes! I can do that, I want justice for all." And then Micah says: be kind! And I think, "Yes! I love kindness, I can do that." And then he says: walk humbly. And I think... "Huh?" Because just when I start to think of setting goals of being humble, or thinking about *just how humble I am*... it kind of spoils the point, right? Being humble is a little like fight club: the first rule is to not talk about being humble. You just walk.

God's call to *walk humbly* is hard because it puts God in direct competition, or opposition, to a fierce competitor: me. Most of us, probably, and our desires to be seen, and accomplished, and known. There was a poll done of teenagers in the UK done in the early 2000s that asked, how many of you would like to be famous? Half of all teens said yes. And then, just a few years ago, in 2019, a marketing company asked teens and young adults in America – and 86% of those who answered the poll said yes, they want to be an influencer. Now, most of us in our youth have big ideas of our future and life that shifts as we age. But one thing that doesn't shift much: is our innate desire to be known and seen. And for most us, one way that is defined is through some kind of public success or accomplishments.

Our yearly Christmas letters tell the highlights of our life: the big vacations and promotions, the winning goals. Our social media captures the same: a family day volunteering, the really clever thing my toddler said, the important "must see" event, that I saw. But we don't share, often, of the things we struggle with. The times we've been hurt or lost. The races we didn't finish. Because we have something in us that wants to make sure we look good to the world around us. We paint a picture of ourselves and lives to mirror that. And don't get me wrong: I love Christmas letters and I love social media. I have certain stories that I share, and others that I don't, in those spaces too.

But here's what I wonder: are there places in our life, where we bring our entire selves?

The mess and mistakes. The places we fall short.

Is there a place for us to do good, to be kind, without taking that selfie?

A space to trust fully the promises of God for us.

This week, I stumbled upon a Rabbi who said that all of Jewish law could be summarized in this Micah passage. Every law could somehow come back to one of these three categories: justice, kindness, or humility. The laws about what we wear or eat, the rules about being in relationships with God and others, aaaaall those long (and boring!) verses in the Leviticus and Deuteronomy... somehow can be related back to this: Be just. Kind. Humble.

But also, this Rabbi said, take notice: Because the first two commands are about how you act and live in the world. They tend to be things you do *out there* that can be seen by others. But the last piece? This last one about walking humbly with God? That is about *here* (heart), your awareness of self and connection to God. And by telling us to *walk*, rather than *do* or *love* as the first two command, I think we're being reminded of the everyday nature of our relationship and faith. Every day we are to walk with God. Every footstep we take, is to be done humbly with God.

And in order to do the first two well, the third must also be in place.

You cannot do justice without being kind.

You can't love kindness without having humility.

And you can't walk humbly with God, placing your footsteps within theirs, without desiring justice and loving kindness.

Considering all of this, then, I think there are three important aspects to *walking humbly* with God. It's about *honesty* in your relationship with: Jesus. Others. Yourself. Being honest in your relationship means incorporating all the things we talked about last week: prayer, paying attention, and practicing. But woven throughout all of this, it also means knowing deep within yourself that **God is God and You are Not**. We might hear this and think, of course I know I am not God. But how many times do we act otherwise? How often do we think: *if I can do enough, try hard enough, be perfect or funny or smart enough... that then, then life will be right. I will be okay*. How often do we think the key behind our success or happiness is found in our bank accounts or resumes, our clean homes or completed to do lists.

Instead of resting in the knowledge that our happiness, our joy, is in God.

Our wholeness our accomplishment is in being God's own. And that nothing you are or do will change that you are God's. But – God *is still* God. And you are not.

I'm guilty of this. Especially when I'm feeling stressed out or worn thin or anxious. A voice inside of me begins to get louder and tell me that it is my own strength, my own abilities, my own self. My, my, my... that will get me through it. But it's not about me, is it? . How often do we forget that God – the same one who led the Israelites out of Egypt. The same one who took on flesh in Jesus. Has us, too.

Now you know part of my story, and that part of this, is that my spouse and I have moved several times together. I've become an expert packer, a very good purger, and quite knowledgeable about the ins and outs of changing addresses and starting again. But every time, when a move approaches, I worry. Will this be the right fit? Is this the right time? What about. What if. And the spiral of thoughts get big, the list of tasks to do gets long. And just as certain, there comes a time when God reminds me: I've got this. God's got this. The same God who called me into ministry, who has called me into motherhood, will guide my next steps. It might not be easy. Something may break along the way. But, I'll never be alone. God will not call me here without seeing it thru. And you know what? When I make space to be humble and know that God is God, and I am not? Things tend to go more smoothly.

The passage from Matthew comes quickly to mind: if God cares about the birds of the air, how much more does God care for me? SO do not worry. If God who placed the mountains solidly on the ground, dotted the night sky with each and every sun, and feeds and protects every bird... certainly, God can navigate the bumps and transition in my life, too.

And here, when I have clarity to embrace this humility... I find peace. Because it will be okay. I will have a home, a family, a God who guides me. Creating this space of walking humbly with God means making space to be fully present. Owning and acknowledging your sins. Your limitations. Knowing that my own lists or schedule is not the way thru. *God* is the way thru. And God is here in the middle of it all. Trusting then, that God is God, puts into perspective my relationship with myself, too. It keeps my own ego in check, but also my worries and my dreams. If at the center of my motivation is walking with God, then my own life finds its meaning in walking well.

To walk humbly with God, is not to think *less* of yourself. But to think of *yourself* less.

To change the order of your thinking, to place God first and allow the rest to follow.

It means praying in the quiet, without worry of the “right” words, instead speaking the true words of your heart. It means doing something because it is the good thing, even if no one sees, and no public accolades follow.

Let me tell you a story about humility and children’s worship bag. You know the bags, right? We’ve got some here, like a lot of churches. A small bag for kids, filled with crayons and board books, maybe a few quiet toys – with the intention of helping children during worship. Well, as these bags are used, they get messy and filled. The coloring books need to be changed out, the crayons replaced, the bags washed. At one church I served, many years ago, I had decided before Christmas that I should make sure our bags were ready: cleaned and organized.

I gathered them all up, and to my surprise: they were all perfect. Now, knew that kids used these every week. There is *no* way that they should be perfectly clean and stocked. And even though I’d been pastor here for some time, I had never talked or seen anyone clean these bags. My curiosity was peaked.

Our office admin didn’t know who took care of them. A “church mouse,” she said. Our primary usher didn’t know either. Neither did our Sunday School teacher or nursery attendant.

It was a mystery! And then, as luck would have it... one night I was at church late, when no one else was around. I’d stopped by for something I’d forgotten earlier. And what did I see? But one of the ladies of our church, busy at a table cleaning and organizing children’s bags! I come to find out, that she has done this for years. Quietly, with no fuss. It was a simple way, she said, that she could care for the families of our church and help them feel welcome.

There are many ways to walk humbly, but I think that was a pretty good one.

She was doing something quietly, in service to others, because it helped her practice her faith.

And she’s not the only one. There are countless stories of people living out their faith in humble ways. Stories that go untold, because their goal is of service, and nothing more.

And sometimes, we can just feel so lucky as to notice or know.

But these folks, they have learned that their acts of humility *are* still seen. Not by you or me.

Not by tv crews or social media. But by God. Our God who sees them, knows them, and loves them deeply.

Of course walking humbly doesn't mean walking in secret. It doesn't mean that *no one* sees or knows what you are doing, but it means the position of your heart is one that is open to God's presence, and acting in ways of love toward others. **Walking humbly is about right relationship with JESUS, OTHERS, & YOURSELF.** One will naturally fall into place after the other. Because once I've placed God first, and step my footsteps in theirs... I will find my path naturally guiding where God's heart leads.

And that will always be to a place of humbly myself to love and care for those around me, just as God loves and cares for me.

Anne Lamott writes about walking and serving humbly with God, listen to what she says: **"It begins in our hearts and then dovetails into behavior. It almost always makes you willing to be of service, which is where the joy resides. When you are aware of all that has been given to you, in your lifetime and in the past few days, it is hard not to be humbled and pleased to give back."** *It begins in our hearts and dovetails into behavior.* When we humble ourselves to be in right relationship with God – our hearts will be transformed. Or *strangely warmed*, as Wesley once said. And we'll find greater acceptance of our true selves – a decrease in our own sense of ego or pride, and an increase in our trust of God. Then, our hearts will be moved toward action. Toward love of others.

Walking humbly with God, our eyes will be opened to the people God loves, the people God serves. Our hearts will be cracked open to make space for the world around us. We will find ourselves following in God's steps to love as God loves. In his most famous sermon, the Beatitudes, which we read today, Jesus talks about being humble. He says, *"happy are the humble, for they will inherit the earth."* Jesus is calling blessed those who know God is God, and humbly submit to God's power and presence. The beatitudes, taken in their entirety, gives an image of the world where we walk humbly with God. But its an unexpected image. Jesus says *happy are...* or some translations say: *blessed are...* the grieving and the weak. The hopeless and the hungry. And none of these are things we usually would call blessed, are they? We don't typically expect these experience to bring happiness. But our God is one of surprises. Constantly up ending our expectation, turning the world upside down. **The thing is, these are not verses that tell us how the world is, but rather – how God is.**

To the hopeless, God promises the kingdom of heaven. The grieving, God promises gladness. To those that hunger for justice, for a rightness in the world, God promises fulfillment. Each of the beatitudes is a call toward humility. That is, to trust in God's presence and actions, over our own desires or strength. Because to be a peacemaker, requires humility to admit your own limitations. To be merciful means having the humility to recognize your own need for mercy. To be pure in heart, asks for the humility to release pride and ego. To grieve, is to embrace your own humble awareness that the world is not as it should be.

Again and again, God calls us to be a people of humility, who see the world as God sees, and walk in God's footsteps towards its completion. This requires us to be reflective of God's invitation, and our actions: the good, the bad, the apathetic. And to earnestly seek to make things right. But it also requires us to be a people of hope. To trust that as God calls us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly: that God will be with us and see it through.

Binding all of these lessons together is one overarching theme. The main thread that runs through all of scripture. Love. As Paul says in Colossians, *love binds all things together.*

It is God's deep and endless love for us that is our beginning, middle and end. It requires humility to accept these offerings of God. And it is our love of God that makes us to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly. Trusting that, when we do this, beautiful and unexpected things will happen. The broken will find healing. The grieving will turn to dancing. The hungry will be filled. And what more? When we focus on right and humble relationships with Jesus, Others,

and Yourself? What will we find? **JOY**. Jesus. Others. Yourself. JOY. Centering our lives and hearts on right relationships with all three will bring joy and meaning to our lives. We will find *joy* in ways most unexpected. In people and places most unexpected.

Following the footsteps, walking humbly, with God, making right our relationships with Jesus, Others, and Yourself? Joy unexpected. This is a joy that will bring peace to our hearts and guide our steps. It will guide us to a life of right living, naturally walking humbly- caring less of what the world sees or knows of us, and trusting in who God knows us to be. That joy set in our hearts, thru the right ordering of these relationships will catapult us to a life of doing Justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly. We will more easily find our hearts dovetailing into action, into service of others because of our love of God. Imagine the stories our lives will tell, not only thru our social media or Christmas cards, but with every breath - - when we focus not on our own ego and needs, but of a life lived well: grounded in our love of Jesus, others, and self. Stories of Gods goodness and promises revealed: where the world Jesus paints thru the beatitudes are revealed, and the grieving, the hungry, the lowly: all blessed. All humbled by the promises of God made known.

Let us pray:

Holy God, you have created the world and that is within it. You have made us in your image, and called us yours. Guide our steps, that we follow as you lead to love your world with a passion that echos your own. Give us humility to right our relationships with you, with others, and ourselves... that we might know lasting joy and hope in you. Bless our congregation in new and unexpected ways, give us courage to do justice, to love kindness, to walk humbly with you... Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of October 16, 2022

Weekly Prayer

Almighty God, you call us to be just, kind, and humble. Give us courage, great Creator, to walk in your ways. Guide us, Redeeming Christ, toward a happy life that is reflective of you. Stay with us, Comforting Spirit, that we walk always with your justice, kindness, and humility. Amen.

Monday, October 17

Scripture: Matthew 5:4-6

“Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.

“Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.

“Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.

Observation

In the Beatitudes, Jesus named those who grieve, are humble, and hunger and thirst for righteousness as receivers of “wonderful news.” The CEB translation calls them *happy*. Other translations say they are *blessed*. But if we look around, we don’t see that reflected in our world. Jesus was not offering timeless truths about how the world works; he was inviting us to imagine the way the world *could* be. Or the way God sees us: blessed and loved.

Application

How does it feel to know that God sees you as you grieve, promises to quench your thirst and to fill all who are hungry? How might God be inviting you to make a difference in the world, bringing the Kingdom of God nearer for all?

Prayer

God, we hear your promises to be with us always. Give us eyes to see others as you do, that we might be your hands and feet in the world.

Tuesday, October 18

Scripture: Psalm 131

LORD, my heart isn't proud;
my eyes aren't conceited.
I don't get involved with things too great or wonderful for me.
No. But I have calmed and quieted myself
like a weaned child on its mother;
I'm like the weaned child that is with me.
Israel, wait for the LORD—
from now until forever from now!

Observation

The first verse of, "Come and Find the Quiet Center" reads: "*Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead, find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed: clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes, that we can see all the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be.*" How can you quiet your soul today? What new wisdom might God reveal to you in this space?

Application

The first verse of, "Come and Find the Quiet Center" reads: "*Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead, find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed: clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes, that we can see all the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be.*" How can you quiet your soul today? What new wisdom might God reveal to you in this space?

Prayer

God, help me to find a quiet center. Speak and help me listen. Fill my heart with your wisdom and love. Amen.

Wednesday, October 19

Scripture: Psalm 42

Just like a deer that craves streams of water,
my whole being craves you, God.
My whole being thirsts for God, for the living God.
When will I come and see God's face?
My tears have been my food both day and night,
as people constantly questioned me,
"Where's your God now?"
But I remember these things as I bare my soul:
how I made my way to the mighty one's abode,
to God's own house,
with joyous shouts and thanksgiving songs—
a huge crowd celebrating the festival!
Why, I ask myself, are you so depressed?

Why are you so upset inside?
Hope in God!
Because I will again give him thanks,
my saving presence and my God.
My whole being is depressed.
That's why I remember you
from the land of Jordan and Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.
Deep called to deep at the noise of your waterfalls;
all your massive waves surged over me.
By day the LORD commands his faithful love;
by night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.
I will say to God, my solid rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why do I have to walk around, sad, oppressed by enemies?”
With my bones crushed, my foes make fun of me,
constantly questioning me: “Where's your God now?”
Why, I ask myself, are you so depressed?
Why are you so upset inside?
Hope in God!
Because I will again give him thanks, my saving presence and my God.

Observation

"Just like a deer that craves streams of water, my whole being craves you, God." The opening verse of the Psalm tells us of one who *craves* God with their whole being. As the Psalm continues, we see that this faithfulness endures even in difficult times. Hope in God's promises and presence helps the Psalmist and us.

Application

For what do you hope? How does your hope in God's promises make a difference in your life?

Prayer

Jesus, even in difficult seasons, you are with me. Make me to hunger and thirst for your righteousness. Make me to seek your presence always and fill me with your hope. Amen.

Thursday, October 20

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-3

Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God. Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love, and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together.

Observation

"Live a life worthy of the calling you have received." This sounds like a tall order, doesn't it? God knows we are imperfect people and offers an abundance of grace as we walk in faith. And yet, as John Wesley reminds us, we are to be always "moving on to perfection," which is to wake each day with the intention of following God's commands more closely. To live a life worthy of the call we've received. Ephesians reminds us that walking with God includes humility, patience, and unity.

Application

Each of these remind us that we live in community and rely upon God, and others, for fullness in our own lives. Pay attention today to opportunities God gives to practice humility, patience, and unity. Where might God be inviting you to “go deeper”?

Prayer

Jesus, our perfecter and redeemer, look upon the broken places in my life and bring healing. Give me courage to live a life worthy of the calling you give, helping me edge ever closer to perfection. And when I misstep, guide me again on the path. Amen.

Friday, October 21

Scripture: James 1:19-25

Know this, my dear brothers and sisters: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to grow angry. This is because an angry person doesn't produce God's righteousness. Therefore, with humility, set aside all moral filth and the growth of wickedness, and welcome the word planted deep inside you—the very word that is able to save you. You must be doers of the word and not only hearers who mislead themselves. Those who hear but don't do the word are like those who look at their faces in a mirror. They look at themselves, walk away, and immediately forget what they were like. But there are those who study the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continue to do it. They don't listen and then forget, but they put it into practice in their lives. They will be blessed in whatever they do.

Observation

The short book of James follows a similar format to Proverbs, where instead of creating one long letter or story, it strings together a series of wise ideas and suggestions. Here, James switches abruptly between themes of speech and the importance of putting our faith in action. And yet, we know our words and actions are strongly connected. In both places, God reminds us to be humble: trusting that it is God who works through us, bringing blessings upon ourselves and others.

Application

We are drawn to greatness, and to stories of individuals who break through on their own. And yet, we worship a God who calls us to be good, to live in community, and to trust that the good we do is by God's Spirit at work within us. How is God calling you to walk humbly today? In what areas in life are you tempted to take credit, rather than acknowledge the work of God in your life?

Prayer

God, open my eyes to see the ways you are at work in my life. Help me to humble myself, and to declare your goodness in my life. Make me to speak and act in ways that honor you. Amen.

Saturday, October 22

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

God calls us to a life that counters what our culture often values most. Like Micah, we need reminders to listen well to how God calls us to live. The things God looks at are matters of the heart. How is it that you live and love well? How do you care for others?

Application

How has your reading of this passage changed since we first read it? How is God guiding you anew to be just, kind and humble?

Prayer

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