

Basingstoke & Reading Circuit Sunday Service – prepared by David Shaw  
15<sup>th</sup> November 2020

Welcome to worship. We meet once again in lockdown, but still together by God's Spirit and calling. God is with us as we God's people offer praise and prayer. You are invited to take a moment to be still and become aware of God's presence within you and surrounding you. That's not about feeling as if God is there. It is accepting that God is there and resting in that reality. Be still:

Pause

Let us sing:

**Hymn StF 28 Jesus calls us OMIT verse 4** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ModYoPReYYw>  
(alternative H&P 'Praise my soul the King of heaven')

1

Jesus calls us here to meet him  
as, through word and song and prayer,  
we affirm God's promised presence  
where his people live and care.  
Praise the God who keeps his promise;  
praise the Son who calls us friends;  
praise the Spirit who, among us,  
to our hopes and fears attends.

2

Jesus calls us to confess him  
Word of life and Lord of all,  
sharer of our flesh and frailness,  
saving all who fail or fall.  
Tell his holy human story;  
tell his tales that all may hear;  
tell the world that Christ in glory  
came to earth to meet us here.

3

Jesus calls us to each other,  
vastly different though we are;  
creed and colour, class and gender  
neither limit nor debar.  
Join the hand of friend and stranger;  
join the hands of age and youth;  
join the faithful and the doubter  
in their common search for truth.

John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)

**Prayer**

Gracious God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
we praise you for your faithfulness to us.  
Your steadfast love never ceases.  
Your mercies never come to an end.  
They are new every morning.  
We praise that when we awake you are there.  
As we live through each day you are our constant companion.  
And each night you watch over us.

*In a moment or two of quietness that reflect on the week and identify moments when you have recognised the fingerprints of God. Hint – look for kindness experienced, look for acts of generosity, look for times when goodness has been spoken of. And give thanks*

Pause

Thank you, God. In you we are indeed rich beyond compare.

Forgive us, heavenly Father, when we live as if you aren't there.  
Forgive us when we live as if we know best.  
Forgive us when we live without kindness.  
Forgive us when we turn a blind eye to injustice.

Father, forgive.

As we say these things, we are conscious that we don't deserve to be forgiven and that we are constantly guilty of the same things. You are our only hope. We dare to believe that in Jesus we are forgiven. We know the cost of this forgiveness. May an awareness of the sacrifice, may a deepening understanding of your grace and may the work of your Holy Spirit turn our lives round to reflect your life in ours.

In the saving name of Jesus, we pray.

Amen

**Hymn StF 504 (H&P 739) May the mind of Christ** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ghgaqT57lk>

1

May the mind of Christ my Saviour  
live in me from day to day,  
by his love and power controlling  
all I do or say.

2

May the word of God dwell richly  
in my heart from hour to hour,  
so that all may see I triumph  
only through his power.

3

May the peace of God my Father  
rule my life in everything,  
that I may be calm to comfort  
sick and sorrowing.

4

May the love of Jesus fill me,  
as the waters fill the sea;  
him exalting, self forgetting —  
this is victory.

5

May I run the race before me,  
strong and brave to face the foe,  
looking only unto Jesus  
as I onward go.

Katie Barclay Wilkinson  
(1859–1928)

## Readings

Old Testament Micah 6 v 6 – 8

New testament – what is a common thread? Luke 8 v 1 – 3, Mark 8 v 27 – 30, 10 v 32 – 34

## Sermon

'And what does the Lord require of you?

To do justice

to love kindness

to walk humbly with your God.'

Micah 6 verse 8

I have never thought of the 3 components of the answer to the question above as sequential – one flowing from the other. But as I've prepared this sermon there does seem to be a flow, but it is in reverse order!! It may not be what Micah intended but I believe there to be something helpful in sharing it. So, we start with the 3<sup>rd</sup> statement:

'to walk humbly with your God'

It's a beautiful image, which resonates with me. It's what the 12 disciples did for 3 years. They had seen in Jesus something which drew them even compelled them to follow and walk with him. It was in the walking with that they began to discover more of who he was. It wasn't at the beginning of their time together that Jesus asked, 'who do you say that I am?'. What Jesus found was they had come a long way in their understanding but there was a way to go yet. So, they walked and shared some more.

'Walking with' resonates for me because I love walking in the hills, along the coast, even around the streets of Reading in lockdown. Whilst I have walked alone, my preference is for companionship, especially when map reading is required! It is a time of deepening relationship. It is a time of discovery. It is a time to share moments of great wonder, lots of laughs, some dodgy uncertain times and some quite tedious slogging through rain and mud.

This image of 'walking with God' speaks of relationship, an attitude of being together.

You may have noticed I've not been using a key word from the original quote from Micah. I've so far ignored 'humbly'. This reminds us that we are disciples in the presence of the Rabbi, the Master, the Lord. I remember one church leader, who I really admired for what he was doing, saying how often we talk and act as if we're taking God for a walk – expecting God to see and bless all we're doing. Humbly means we go where the Rabbi, the Master, the Lord says. It means listening to what he is saying, seeing things through his eyes, noticing what he points out. It means being attentive to what he is teaching. It doesn't mean there isn't push back from us or challenge or question, but it does mean ultimately God is God. Learning 'to walk humbly with God' takes a lifetime. It is whole life discipleship. It is an invitation to join an adventure.

'to love kindness'

This is about the kindness we do and not the kindness we receive. Loving, is in scripture about choices, about decisions, about the will. It is not about feelings. That always feels a bit of a disappointment, less glamorous, less romantic. But to be honest it is deeper and ultimately far more enriching. 'to love kindness' means to decide to be kind, to choose to be kind. There are times when that's easy. I could imagine that carers who visit a variety of vulnerable people in their homes have their favourites; those they find it easy to be kind to. People who are responsive, grateful, friendly and obviously glad to see them. There will be others too who are frustrated and angry by their condition, who are argumentative as they struggle to maintain some independence. Those people may present as grumpy and miserable and will be less easy to be kind to, but the carer has to choose to be kind.

As people who are walking humbly with God we are 'required' to choose to be kind.

Let's be clear, that doesn't mean accepting things that are unjust, discriminatory, or dismissive, but it does define the way we respond to such statements and actions. Kindness seeks to challenge injustice, discrimination and diminishing of people. But it does so in ways which bridge not polarise, reconcile not separate, which build up not knock down. Kindness seeks the good of the aggressor and perpetrator as well as the victim.

'to do justice'

If we as Christian disciples are walking humbly with our God, and choosing to be kind, then it inevitably leads us to be people who do justice. Over the period since March the time has been marked by matters of justice/injustice – George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, Unconscious Bias, the uneven impact of Covid on different socio-economic and race groups, the international questions of increased Israeli settlements in the West Bank almost going under the radar, the unequal impact of Climate change on the poorest people in the poorest nations. The list goes on. Because the list goes on, we can feel overwhelmed. The first and key thing we must do is notice the injustice, acknowledge its presence – 'that's not right', 'that's not what God intends'. If we don't notice and don't acknowledge it then we begin to accept it. It becomes the familiar and the okay. 'Doing Justice' starts with noticing and acknowledging. If that injustice happens in our presence, we need to challenge it for it is not okay. That is what we are all required to do. 'Doing Justice' in the context of the overwhelming list is sometimes a question of asking the One you are walking with which is yours to pick up and combat. For example, I am aware of the injustices which Amnesty International highlight, but I don't believe it is mine to focus on. I am grateful to God that many do work with Amnesty in tackling those matters. What God has placed on my heart is Climate Justice and Unconscious Bias. What injustice is your walking Rabbi companion asking you to combat?

What does the Lord require of you?

To walk humbly with your God

to love kindness

to do justice.

**Hymn StF 696 (H&P 402) For the healing of the nations** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXtflE6jSYQ>

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|---|---|
| 1 For the healing of the nations,<br>Lord, we pray with one accord ;<br>for a just and equal sharing<br>of the things that earth affords.<br>To a life of love in action<br>help us rise and pledge our word.             | 3 All that kills abundant living,<br>let it from the earth be banned ;<br>pride of status, race, or schooling,<br>dogmas that obscure your plan.<br>In our common quest for justice<br>may we hallow life's brief span. |
| 2 Lead us forward into freedom ;<br>from despair your world release,<br>that, redeemed from war and hatred,<br>all may come and go in peace.<br>Show us how through care and goodness<br>fear will die and hope increase. | 4 You, Creator-God, have written<br>your great name on humankind ;<br>for our growing in your likeness<br>bring the life of Christ to mind ;<br>that by our response and service<br>earth its destiny may find.         |

Fred Kaan (1929–2009)

**Prayer**

These will be a time of quiet. As you prepare for the quietness you are invited to consider the following. The sermon identified several matters of injustice. You may wish to reflect in God's presence on any one or more of those issues. I often need reminding that in prayers I'm not telling God what God doesn't know. God is already active in combatting each of these injustices. Part of our calling as we walk humbly with God is to see where God is at work and add our prayers and actions. In your prayers ask God where he is requiring you to show kindness. Hold before God those people and situations you hold on your heart. Quietness

**Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn StF 564 (H&P 745) O Thou who camest from above**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3UYybc7Xa0>

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 O thou who camest from above<br>the pure celestial fire to impart,<br>kindle a flame of sacred love<br>on the mean altar of my heart !         | 3 Jesus, confirm my heart's desire<br>to work, and speak, and think for thee ;<br>still let me guard the holy fire,<br>and still stir up thy gift in me — |
| 2 There let it for thy glory burn<br>with inextinguishable blaze,<br>and trembling to its source return,<br>in humble prayer and fervent praise. | 4 Ready for all thy perfect will,<br>my acts of faith and love repeat,<br>till death thy endless mercies seal,<br>and make the sacrifice complete.        |

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

**Blessing**

As you walk with God, may you know his peace bringing acceptance.  
As you walk with God, may you know his face turned towards you in love.  
As you walk with God, may you see through his eyes of compassion.  
As you walk with God, may you know God's blessing.

Amen.