

“All We Need to Do”

Micah 6:1-8; I Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12; Psalm 15 2-03-08

There are some weeks when those who put together the lectionary seem to overload the content of the readings. There is so much good stuff to choose from for a meditation or a sermon that some of it goes begging. There are also other weeks, when those of us who use these regularly assigned readings, must shake our heads wondering if there is anything to be taken from them as the core of our contemplations. This is one of those weeks that is “overloaded” and that could supply several sermons.

In his First Letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote of the foolishness of humans and the foolishness of God. He noted that in God’s foolishness there is much wisdom. He marvels that God uses common people, not those who are placed higher in education or in position, to guide others into an understanding of their Creator.

In Matthew we have the section of the Sermon on the Mount known as the Beatitudes. These little one-line statements tell us which people are “happy” or “blessed.” It has a similar theme with that found in the reading from Corinthians. It seems those least likely to succeed, in earthly terms, are the ones praised. It also seems those people who think they are the brightest and best are not recognized as such in the eyes of God.

In the famous quote from the prophet Micah, verbiage is set aside and he simply tells us all we have to do to be successful people. “He 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 words have lived through the centuries as the essential characteristics of people who choose to live in a way that is in accord with God’s desire for us.

We are to work at keeping things in balance in our lives. We are to remember that all people are the children of God and as such are loved by their Maker. We are not to judge people as being worthy or unworthy because they do not fit our narrow parameters of what a person should be as a parent, as a child, as a husband, as a wife, as a significant other, as a stranger, as a friend. No two of us are alike. That is allowed and celebrated in God’s world. We need to see this and grant justice to everyone as we would want it granted to us.

We are to love mercy or kindness. I always wonder what it takes for us to treat one another with kindness and a little softness. We can be very quick to shred and dismiss one another. I know it requires a change in our thought processes to refrain from this unkind way of living. But, with some effort, we certainly can do it. A woman in a Nazi concentration camp named Etty Hillesum gave us direction for doing this. She wrote: “Each of us must turn inward and destroy in him or herself all that he or she thinks he or she must destroy in others.” When we are able to do this we find ourselves moving toward broader empathy toward those who surround us. We can seek to understand more completely the complexities of one another and then accept others as who they are and where they are in life. We are all tremendously complicated beings. We can never truly know another person. But we can try to understand where someone is in life and why he or she is where they are.

We always hold the hope that people are changing and growing in their relationships with themselves, with one another and with God. That is what life should be all about, a continuing process of transformation as we all have those special “aha moments” when we see a situation or a person in another light. Kindness and mercy go a long way in granting others the space to come to new insights. They might not come to our way of seeing things, but that is allowed.

Then there is that little phrase about “walking humbly with our God.” This is a call to recognize that we are just human and that we are not God. We are the created and not the Creator. Many have a problem grasping this. They believe that life is “all about them.” How exhausting this is for people who do not think this way. People who live just for themselves try to control everything in their world. They believe they are the bright shining North Stars and all must be in awe. People who dance a little too close to these “stars” often find themselves burned into a new awakening of what has value and true luster in life.

Could it be that those who are considered “just average people” are the ones who have the most brilliance? Could it be that those who do justice and love kindness are the ones who are able to walk the most humbly with God? Micah, Jesus and Paul would probably all answer “Yes” to those questions. With a little consideration, we might, too.

-- Amen