

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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Debbie Manning
Life Verses: Micah 6:8
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Last week John started out our sermon series on life verses preaching from 1st Corinthians 15:10. As you see, these big, huge letters here spell out L-I-F-E. We invite you during communion today or before or after services in the weeks to come to take a Sharpie and write down your own life verse. As you can see, some people have already done that. A life verse is a verse from the Bible that defines your life, or maybe it is a verse where you have really seen God work in your life, a verse that inspires you or gives you direction.

Last spring when the preaching schedule came out for the summer, those of us who were asked to preach in this particular series were asked to respond with a life verse. Immediately I emailed back Micah 6:8. That's my life verse. It has always spoken to me, touching a deep place in my being. From the first time I heard it, I had this sense of God's truth stated simply and clearly. I love Micah 6:8, but as soon as all of our responses for preaching were submitted and the preaching schedule was set, I started thinking that my knee-jerk reaction choosing Micah 6:8 was not wise.

You see, I have spent every Tuesday and Thursday evening from September last year through June of this year learning Greek, ancient Biblical Greek to be exact, the original language of the New Testament. Well, Micah is from the Old Testament. It was originally written in Hebrew. What was I thinking! I couldn't believe I had made that decision, missing my chance to use my newfound skills to translate a verse in the Bible from its original language, Greek! And if you haven't heard, and if you ever saw me on a Tuesday or Thursday last year you *did* hear, those skills were hard to come by. But as I was lamenting my choice to choose a life verse from the Old Testament, it came to me that I could still tie in my Greek.

One of my favorite exercises we did last year in one of my Greek classes was a study of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:7-15. We spent a lot of time learning how to determine the original writer's meaning of any given word and eventually whole sentences and passages. To find the meaning of a Greek verb, we needed to know the person, number, tense, voice, mood, and lexical form of each word. Each of these things is important in figuring out the meaning. As we looked at the Lord's Prayer, we discussed what it meant that the verbs used in the first part or the three petitions of this prayer were in the imperative mood. The imperative is the form of the verb used for commands. Well, that changes everything. Listen.

Our Father in heaven, *set apart* Your Holy Name.
Bring Your Kingdom.
Cause Your will to be fulfilled on earth as it is in heaven.

Now these first three petitions although absolutely talking about the activity of God in history, in the world, are not without implications for the disciples who were being taught by Jesus how to pray. The very form of the third person imperatives used here has some scholars believing that it points to the disciples' involvement in prayer. And if it points to their involvement in prayer, it points to our involvement. It points to us!

*Bring Your Kingdom.
Cause Your will to be done.*

We get to participate in that. In fact, we are required to. It is all part of God's plan. Bring it! That's what Micah 6:8 is about. How are we to be a part of bringing God's Kingdom to earth? Listen to Micah 6:8.

⁸ He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justice, to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God?

I love this verse because I don't think God could have spelled it out any more clearly. I hear the words and I just know that it is this simple, this clear, this true. This is how God has created us and calls us, no, how He *requires* us to live! I believe when we live out this command from God, we are a part of bringing God's Kingdom to earth, bringing a glimpse of that heavenly Kingdom where we will live in God's presence, His loving presence, eternally!

Here is the context of this verse. Micah was a prophet from Moresheth about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem. He prophesied during the 8th century, and his contemporaries were Hosea and Isaiah. He was writing to God's people of Israel and Judah, the northern and southern kingdoms, to warn them that judgment was coming and to offer pardon to all who repented. The theme throughout Micah is of judgment and forgiveness. What Micah makes clear is that God hates unkindness, idolatry, injustice, and empty ritual—things that God still hates today.

Earlier in chapter 6, Israel is accused of breaking their covenant with God. God's faithfulness to His people is recounted. We pick up where Micah is telling us what God considers good, and what he reveals is that God requires us to do His will. And what is God's will for us? Here it is. **God requires and delights in a faith that produces justice, loves kindness, and walks humbly with Him.** And when we do it and love it and walk it, we are bringing it, bringing a glimpse of the Kingdom here to earth.

In regard to the three things that God requires us to do, pastor and scholar James Howell, says this about Micah 6:8.

But this isn't a checklist: Justice? Got it. Kindness? Working on it. Walk humbly? Maybe someday. The lines between the three are blurry. Justice requires humility, which induces kindness, which looks a lot like humility, as does real justice. Justice is a different kind of justice because it is paired with walking humbly, and kindness has a different edge because it is situated between justice and walking humbly.

Howell goes on to say, and I love this,

Micah's intent for us cannot be that lyric from the pop song *Two out of three ain't bad*. We need all three, which are really one, or we miss all three—and God.

We miss the chance to do God's will, to bring the Kingdom here! Following Micah's order of things, let's take a look at **justice**. God does not want us to just think about justice or wish for justice or want justice. That clearly is not enough. We are told to *do* justice. It is an action. It is not something we do on an occasion but something we live out, part of the fabric of who we are. Doing justice. What are we talking about here when we talk about justice? Micah's understanding of justice might be a bit different from ours. Micah's understanding is more than rules for the smooth ordering of society or even of making sure that everything is fair. Quite honestly, before I studied this passage, that is what I was thinking it was about, but Micah is talking about a justice that is personal to God because it is from God. It is God's justice. God's justice reveals what is in the heart of God. The heart of God calls us to be a just society where everyone belongs, where the neediest are taken good care of, where no one goes hungry or is disenfranchised. Throughout Scripture we see that God is the defender of the poor and the oppressed. We see and know it, but what are we doing about it?

The justice Micah is talking about invites us to share what God has given. These things are not merely for ourselves and those we love but for all people. God wants us, no, He *requires* us to make sure that not one person is left out in the cold, that not one child dies of hunger and that even that hard-to-love person is loved, included and not left alone. Justice not only gives to the poor but also asks the question, "Why does poverty exist?" I am not sure that we are going to like the answer because, honestly, I didn't. As I was reading about this and studying it and preparing for this sermon, I said to my husband, "Oh, this justice piece sort of has me convicted. I'm not sure what I am even going to say." His words of wisdom were incredible. He said, "Honey, be honest. Just stand up there and say, 'I got nothing.'"

But even in our brokenness, I think we can live out the Kingdom in big and small ways. What I know is that I am not fully doing it and that we can all do it better. Don't get me wrong. I see this community doing amazing things, loving the least, the lost, the forgotten. But what I am certain of is that we are called individually and collectively to do justice all year long, in all of our lives. I think it is a habit and a discipline that changes hearts and brings God's Kingdom to earth. A couple of weeks ago when I heard the stories of the high schoolers who had just returned from working in the slums of Zambia, and saw their hearts changed as well as the hearts of those they were with, I was convicted once again that God continues to call us to do justice. When we do it, we bring it!

We can't do justice without **loving kindness**. In Micah's second requirement, the Hebrew words from 2,700 years ago were a little more difficult for scholars to translate. The first word is clearly *love*. The second word is more difficult to translate. Whether we land on to love *loyalty*, to love *goodness*, to love *mercy*, or to love *kindness*, what is important here is that Micah urges us toward a significant kind of love, a love that is a way of life. This kind of love reflects God's commitment to love. Our God is merciful and kind and sticks with us every step of the way through every circumstance in our lives. That's what is required of us. To love kindness.

(Slide shown.) That is my younger sister, Leslie. Seven years ago Leslie was diagnosed with a really aggressive form of breast cancer, and we were all sure she had kicked it, that they got it all. But this past April when she went to see her doctor for what she thought was pneumonia,

she found out that her breast cancer had metastasized and had come back in her lungs and her bones. She is a sixth grade math teacher, in her forties, married. She has a little guy, Reilly, who is seven. It was really hard. Actually, we were pretty devastated. But I will tell you, she is surrounded by a community of people living out God's will for us to love kindness. The prayers, the notes, the meals, the help with childcare have overwhelmed her, overwhelmed her with God's love for her.

A few months ago, she called me up and told me about her neighbor Steph. Steph made up business cards and handed them out at Reilly's school. She lined up meals for Leslie and her family for the next 6 months, and when Leslie came home one day, sitting on her front porch in this very moderate neighborhood was a brand new freezer that her neighbors had pitched in and bought to store all those meals.

She told me about the standing ovation her school had given her at the assembly on the last day of school. She made it back for her last day of school because she wanted to say goodbye to the kids. They had this huge last day assembly. The parents were there and all the kids and the teachers. When she got up to hand out the math awards, she decided spontaneously that she wanted to thank everyone. She said, "I just want to thank you guys. You've been my community. You've been my prayer warriors. You've kept me going, and I want to thank you." As she sat down, to her surprise she got a standing ovation.

Then she told me that out of the blue an old friend who happened to be a nurse called and offered to go with her to her oncologist and radiologist appointments. Do you know what my sister said to me? She ends the conversation by saying? "Deb, who could have a better life than me? Who could be more blessed?" Because here's the deal. Cancer or no cancer, Leslie *gets* God's love for her because people have brought the Kingdom to her. When we love kindness, our actions bring the Kingdom here. All those people loving kindness brought the Kingdom to my sister, assuring her of God's faithfulness.

See that shawl around her shoulders. That shawl was knitted by our prayer shawl ministry here. Before one of my visits out to Boulder, someone from the prayer shawl team called me and said, "Deb, we knitted a shawl for your sister, and we'd like you to bring it to her." Now this prayer shawl ministry is unbelievable. They get together and knit and knit and pray. They even pray for people they don't know. We dedicated this shawl in the chapel with our tears and our hearts. I brought it to my sister, and she wears it during her chemo treatments and when she's doing her devotions. Guess what? You guys brought the Kingdom to my sister, and a funny thing happened along the way. You brought the Kingdom to me, and I thank you for that. When we love it, we bring it!

Here we are at God's third requirement: **to walk humbly with your God**. How do we do that in this culture that puts a high value on having it all, being it all, climbing the ladder of success, and knowing the right people? We live in a culture that screams, it's all about me, but remember Paul's words.

² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Aren't we created in the image of God? Aren't we special? And this is where humility gets tricky. Our only true value comes from the Creator. It is never about how great I am but about how great He is. Psalm 8 talks about the hidden value of humility.

³ When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;

⁴ What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him?

⁵ Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You crown him with glory and majesty!

That is God's love for us. Only in humility can we ask in wonder and awe, "Who am I, who are we, that God knows us, loves us, and cares for us?" Our value is in being His. This is what James Howell says about humility.

Humility is the simple truth about ourselves, but the truly humble glance away quickly, for their focus is not on their humility but on God.

How do we walk it? We embrace Christ. We embrace who we are in Christ. There is an intentionality and an attentiveness that we need practice in our day-to-day lives, acknowledging God in everything. I think when we do that, it becomes a part of who we are.

I am a Minneapolis police chaplain and on call three days a month. There is nothing that reminds me who I am more than that. Every time I stand at someone's front door, getting ready to knock to tell them that their husband, or sister, or parent, or child has died, I pray, and in that prayer, I always say the same thing. "Thank you, God, that You know what you are doing because I know that I don't." I am humbled every time I am in a pastoral situation. We walk humbly with our God, but the humble are never passive. We are in the world doing justice and loving kindness. We walk with God, never alone. This is what we know to be true, and it is part of what keeps us humble. We can rest in that, trust that, and it frees us up to bring the Kingdom here. What was Jesus' last promise on earth? We saw it in Matthew 28 when He told the disciples to go out into all the world.

²⁰ ...I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

God is with us. We can and need to walk humbly because we walk with an awesome God. He is ours and we are His and together, we walk for the Kingdom, our heavenly Kingdom and the Kingdom here on earth. When we walk it humbly, we bring it.

It is a simple message. What does the Lord require of us? To do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God. I think this threefold vision of God stretches our minds and hearts and, frankly, when we really look at it, it is challenging to live out. I think we are created with this longing to understand and do what God has shown us is good. What is clear from Micah is this. It's not enough for us to think it, wish it, or even pray it. We are to do it, and love it, and walk it because God requires us to bring it. Let's step out in faith, living out justice, love, and humility, knowing that at times we will fail but knowing that the desire to please God pleases God and trusting that the Holy Spirit will work in us, despite us, and produce the fruit of Micah 6:8.

When my girls are home from college in the summer we do this video workout called Insanity. Four or five days a week we follow Shaun T in a series of killer workouts, designed to confuse your muscles. It is a little crazy and even somewhat radical, actually, but when I stick with it and make it part of my daily life, I see change. Every time after we're done, the girls go upstairs and every single time, this is the truth, I stay and watch the advertisement for the next step in exercising, P90X with Tony Horton. I love to watch Tony leading people through the crazy, radical exercises of P90X and, honestly, my favorite part, and I watch it just for this, is the very end. Tony always ends with the words, "Bring it!" Besides just thinking this is super-cool, it really does remind me that God calls us to bring it. When we do it, and love it, and walk it, we get to be a part of bringing it, bringing God's heavenly Kingdom here. Let's pray.

Gracious God, You are amazing. It is amazing that You created us and then clearly told us what it is that You require of us. God, I just pray that every single person in this room can hear Your Word, feel Your Spirit, and just look to You, God, as we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with You. God, we are so grateful that we have the privilege of doing life with one another and of being a part of bringing Your Kingdom. In Your precious and Holy Name, we pray. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.