

Justice. Kindness. Humility. A person could do worse than these as guiding principles for living. And among the wide variety of those who attempt to give us a summary of what it is that God asks of us, Micah is by far my favourite.

Love justice. Do kindness. Walk humbly with your God. No need to worry about what the prophet means; no confusing or archaic terms...though being human we will certainly disagree along the way about what constitutes 'kindness' or how to define 'justice'...

This call through the prophet is a call to a different kind of obedience. Rather than a list of things that are off limits, or rules about hygiene, Micah reminds us that God gives us something to work at. Justice and kindness and humility require us to be paying attention to the world around us; not just the world's effect on us. Micah speaks to a people who have made the mistake that God is selfish. The people imagine that the ritual and sacrificial life that has become their religious habit is required to ensure God's happiness. The people forget that God is self-sufficient in all things; God alone is responsible for God's happiness. But God has extended an invitation to humanity. The Scriptural record is full of specific examples of that invitation, most notably to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but also Noah, David, Solomon, and the wide variety of prophets. That invitation in its essence says 'walk with me.' Come and see what the Lord has done and is doing. Be part of something wonderful. There are rules - God has expectations - but the rules are for the common good, not for God's particular satisfaction.

Do justice; love kindness; walk humbly. Remember you are not alone in this enterprise; know that it should be a joy, rather than a burden; be conscious of one another's welfare; be every mindful of God's presence. Simple, really...not that we are not inclined to take such good advice.

So it is that the invitation that God extends is offered again and again, generation after generation; patriarchs and princes; layers, priests and prophets; thousands of years of trying and failing and trying again to discover the secret that was never really a secret. The Lord has told you, mortal, what is good.

We are not the best listeners - that much is certain. And so, into the timeless cycle of God's endeavour comes Jesus. He is schooled in the ancient Israeli habits of religious observance. He is convinced of the sovereign self-assurance of God. And he responds to God's invitation in a most particular way.

He accepts the mantle of religious teacher and gathers students and friends around him, and as the first gospel tells it, Jesus offers them a glimpse into the way things could be...starting with what we call the beatitudes.

Blessed are they...the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, those who mourn, those who hunger for something better, the peacemakers. It's quite a list, and we all hope to find ourselves represented, don't we? Except Matthew's gospel does a thing that changes the focus of this otherwise lovely list of blessings. The pronouns change - it's very subtle - from 'they' to 'you'. Jesus demonstrates that there is already a divide; the people he has gathered around him may not have been drawn from the upper class, but there were still those who fell beyond the limits of the disciples' limited privilege. Those who mourn; the poor in spirit (literally cringing ones); the meek; the peacemakers - these are 'the other' that Jesus sets apart - those who are waiting to see God's plan fulfilled, **people who have already accepted God's invitation to do what is required**: do justice; love kindness; walk humbly with God.

Those people exist, Jesus seems to be saying (even here at what Matthew calls the beginnings of his ministry) and you will find them because now you are on the path too. You have accepted the invitation; now comes the hard work. You (the pronoun changes) will be reviled because you have made this choice - because of my name - but you will share in the blessing. You are now on the same path as the prophets (and all those others) who accepted the invitation and took up the task of living out the values of God's kingdom. Not an easy path, but a promising and fruitful path.

And not for God's sake - God can quite easily manage God's own expectations - for the sake of justice, kindness and humility. For the sake of all of us.

I wonder now, for the sake of all of us, could we possibly begin to hear God's call in the terms that Micah offered? Do we dare listen to the beatitudes according to the shifting pronouns? Can we imagine that there are already those out there - independent of us - who are poor in spirit, hungering for righteousness, merciful, humble and longing for peace... who are already considered blessed. Is it possible for us to consider, in humility, that we don't know everything – but that together we might pursue the same things...

God has told us what is good. Jesus dares us to listen and act. Let it soon be so.