



*'With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' 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? –Micah 6:6-8*

Greetings members and friends of Bainbridge Community UCC,

I pray this message finds you well.

In July I will be traveling to Orlando, FL to attend the United Church of Christ National Youth Event (NYE) with two youth from our church. NYE is an event that gathers people from all around the country and offers workshops, worship, and other programming specifically designed to engage and speak to our young people. In this world that is so filled with contradictory images of what faith looks like in action, it can be confusing enough for adults. This incredible opportunity gives our young people a place to learn from their peers as well as their elders, experience different styles of worship with lots of other young people, and participate in work that reveals God's love, all in a space that encourages honestly asking and wrestling with the difficult questions of faith.

This year we are going to a city that I can only imagine will still be reeling and wounded from an act that clearly showed some of the very real contradictions and struggle involved in living a life of faith. The attack on LGBTQ folks in a true place of sanctuary for that community and the snippets of information we have about the shooter bring to mind profound questions about God, faith, religious ideologies/leaders, anger, shame, one's own sense of identity and worth, and so much more. What are we to make of it all? What are we to do?

Well, thankfully, we are not the first to wrestle with these questions. The prophet Micah was addressing people who were also wondering what God wanted them to do, how they were supposed to live. He gave them a simple list (simple to remember, not so simple to live) to follow. Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with your God. Great! So what does that mean?

To do justice is to balance the scales for those who are forgotten or oppressed. Micah wrote much about how Israel and Judah had become corrupt allowing the rich to accumulate wealth on the backs of the poor. By doing this, Micah wrote, the wealthy were not loyal to God. (7:2) To love kindness is, in my view, to love our neighbor. Love in the Bible is not an emotion. It is an action. Love is not how we feel about someone. It is about how we value them and treat them. To love kindness is to recognize and *actively affirm* the truth of inherent value in *all* of God's beloved people just as we all are. And, finally, to walk humbly with God is to be open to God's mystery. Theologian Paul Tillich wrote extensively about the risk and doubt that are irreducible aspects of faith. True faith is experiential. God is ultimately beyond our understanding. When we think we have God figured out completely it is time to take a step back, pray, and humbly remember the vastness of our God.

All of these things the prophet Micah wrote God wants us to do point to one conclusion. The way we show we love God is by showing love for all the people of this world God so loves. Easy to say. Not so easy to do. It is something that I know I always need to be reminded of and encouraged in. That is what a community of faith is, a community of support and accountability. A place to show and receive love and to know God as the source of that love. That is why having a faith community with which we feel truly connected and can speak to us in ways we can hear is so important. That is why I am so happy that NYE is here for our young people as they continue to do that work for themselves.

May God's grace and peace be with you all,

Pastor Shaun