

PRBC Sermon for Zoom service at 10.30 am on 2nd August 2020

“And what does the Lord require of you? ...to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8)

This is the third and final part of this short series on Micah 6:8. Two weeks ago Sheila’s sermon was about the first requirement “to act justly” and last Sunday Hugh addressed the second “to love mercy”; this morning we’re going to think about the third “to walk humbly with your God”.

What does it mean “to walk humbly with your God”? What is humility? A dictionary definition: it’s having a modest or low view of one’s importance, from the Latin, ‘humilis’ which literally means low. Not being proud or thinking more highly of oneself, than one ought.

For example, when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17) he humbled himself, taking on the task that a servant would normally carry out. He washed everyone’s feet and dried them with a towel that he’d wrapped around himself.

Imagine how you’d have felt if you’d been one of those disciples...

As far as we know only one of them (Simon Peter) had the courage to object, “No, you shall never wash my feet.” And then Peter reacted in typical fashion when Jesus told him, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” and asked Jesus to wash not just his feet but his hands and head as well!

If Jesus were to ask us the same question he asked the original disciples in v.12: “Do you understand what I have done for you?” how would we reply? Perhaps we’d mumble something about following his example by being willing to wash one another’s feet...

His final recorded comment underlines the importance of genuine humility, “Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

Remember John 8:28-29 “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” This is another beautiful example of the humility of Jesus. Although he is “in very nature God, he didn’t consider equality with God something to be grasped...” (Phil 2:6) Jesus just spoke and did what his Father had taught him.

Let’s look at Philippians 2:1-11 – entitled ‘Imitating Christ’s Humility’. Written from Rome where Paul was imprisoned towards the end of his life, it is a lovely letter of thanks to the church with which he probably had a closer connection than any other he’d helped to found.

Paul takes it for granted that a follower of Christ Jesus would want to have the same attitude or mindset as his or her Lord (v.5). He encourages the Philippians: “in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others”. In this beautiful passage v. 8 spells out just how far Jesus was willing to go for our sake: “He humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross”. The Lord of All was willing to die for us... for me! Although I’ve been a Christian for nearly 50 years, that still amazes me!

To help us understand how we can imitate Christ, Paul uses one of his favourite analogies: the idea of 'putting on' Christ-like characteristics and 'taking off' those things that belong to our 'old self'. In Colossians 3:12 we read: "clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience". (If only it were that easy!) Interestingly in 1 Peter 5:5, the author uses the same phrase "clothe yourselves with humility" because "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble". Ironically, in order to be able to 'put on' such Christ-like qualities... we have to be willing to humble ourselves, swallow our pride and make "walking humbly with our God" our priority in life.

Some examples

Does anyone come to mind when you think of people who possess genuine humility?
We've been able to identify several, some you may know!

Do you remember Jonathan Baker who was Canon Missioner and then Acting Dean at Peterborough Cathedral, before he left to lead the team at Beverley Minster? Clive and I got to know Jonathan through Churches Together in Central Peterborough and found him to be lovely, modest, gentle man. With a degree from Cambridge University, he'd been a solicitor before answering God's call to become a priest. He's pastorally gifted, an inspiring preacher and a great example of a man who has learnt how to walk humbly with God.

Many of us know Ed Walker who set up the homeless charity, Hope into Action, ten years ago. His latest book, 'A House Built on Love' is about how this life-changing charity came into being. Ed is a very capable young man, with lots of energy and drive and yet he doesn't mind admitting he also struggles to cope with the demands of his role. In a chapter called 'The cliff face' he writes: "I tussle with fear, worry about finances, stew on problems, wrestle with insecurity and over-analyse my mistakes." Hope into Action continues to grow and be blessed, perhaps in part because of Ed's humble, self-effacing manner. At the time of the book's publication in early 2020, the charity had 76 homes in partnership with 67 churches from all over England.

Here's someone you probably won't know... Rolf Stucki is the owner-manager of a hotel we often stay at when we're driving through Switzerland. For nearly 20 years, he and his team have been offering warm hospitality to travellers and local people alike. He too is a modest, unselfish man who rolls up his sleeves and helps out when the restaurant is busy; he's equally comfortable receiving new guests and remembers people's names, usually greeting us with a cheery, "The Mortons are back!" Over the years that we've been travelling back and forth to Italy, we've noticed very little turnover in the members of his team. They all have their photographs on a wall in Reception, in alphabetical order.

Looking further back in time... Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) had the reputation of being a very humble man. His father was a prosperous cloth merchant and Francis gave up a lot to roam the Italian countryside, caring for the poor and sharing the Good News about Jesus with anyone who would listen. One of the best known stories about him illustrates his humility. The people of Gubbio were being troubled by a wolf which kept killing their chickens. When they asked Francis for help, he sought out the wolf and asked him why he was doing this. He listened to the wolf as he explained he was hungry. Francis shared this news with the townspeople and asked them to put out food for the

wolf. The problem was solved by a gentle man who was willing to listen to a dangerous animal as he walked humbly with his God.

Brother Lawrence (1614-1691) was another very humble man. He was a lay brother, never a priest, who worked in the monastery kitchen and also mended sandals for the other brothers. After his death, 'The Practice of the Presence of God' was published. It describes a simple, intimate way of relating to God through an almost continuous inner conversation. He also had the reputation of being a good, non-judgmental listener and possessed a God-given wisdom.

The final person who came to mind... Charles Dickens created a character in his novel 'David Copperfield' called Uriah Heep who was "ever so 'umble". Uriah Heep is the antithesis of a person who is genuinely humble; he was a hypocrite, thief and deceiver.

In conclusion, looking back at the verse in Micah that inspired this short series, we find the words: "and what does the Lord require of you?"

I suggest that what the Lord requires of us, today, is to live our lives in a way that pleases him. It may well mean different paths for different individuals, but the core requirement is the same – to demonstrate justice, to be merciful and to walk humbly with our God, gently listening to others' stories and enjoying a rich prayer life with our God in which we find our purpose and reason for living.

Amen