

# What does the Lord require of us?

**May 2018**  
**God's wisdom in our world**  
**Readings, Reflections, Prayers**

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## Monday, May 7: Micah 1:1-9

What do we do with the prophets? More than a quarter of our Bibles is written by the prophets (Isaiah through Malachi), but we rarely read them. The language can be challenging. They sometimes seem irrelevant. And they seem a bit depressing. We often skip right over, zooming on to the gospels.

But Jesus quotes the prophets often. He sees His ministry as the fulfillment of the prophets' message. He uses words from the prophets to highlight the issues and problems people have. The prophets help us see what "sin" is and to understand why we need a Saviour.

The two big themes in the prophets are:

1. **Faithfulness to and worship of the one true God.** People often get seduced into loving and trusting in other things than God: wealth, possessions, power, pleasure. The prophets call us back to God.
2. **Justice.** When we love and worship God, the One who is holy and just, we yearn to see justice done. This means more than a good legal system. Biblical justice means we live with honesty and integrity in our relationships, compassion and care for the poor, forgiveness, mercy, and empowerment.

Micah (whose name means, "Who is like Yahweh") is a country boy who sees the crime and corruption in the land, especially in the cities of Jerusalem (capital of Judah) and Samaria (capital of Israel).<sup>1</sup> He calls people back to faithfulness to God and speaks out against the oppression of the poor, underprivileged, and foreigners.

We "get" the call back to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength in prophets like Micah. It's spiritual good news. We struggle with the prophets' obsession with personal and national integrity, care for the poor, advocacy for the vulnerable, and compassion for refugees: God is concerned we love our neighbour as ourselves in very practical ways. We wrestle with this call to be physical, economic, and practical good news.

When Jesus was asked, "*Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?*" He replied, "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments*" (Matthew 22:36-40).

For God, faithfulness is BOTH loving God wholeheartedly AND loving our neighbour as we would be loved ourselves. It is not an EITHER/OR. It is BOTH/AND. How can I do both today? How can I love God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength today? How can I love my neighbour as myself, today?

*Worthy of praise from every mouth,  
of confession from every tongue,  
of worship from every creature,  
is Your glorious Name, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:  
for you have created the whole world in your grace,  
and by your compassion you have saved the world.  
To your Majesty, O God,  
ten thousand times ten thousand bow down and adore,  
singing and praising without ceasing, and saying,  
'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts;  
heaven and earth are full of your praises!  
Hosanna in the highest!'  
May my heart and my voice worship you  
in Spirit and in truth today, too, O my God!  
I love you, Lord!  
Amen*

Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389)

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<sup>1</sup> After the golden age of Israel under David and Solomon, Israel split into two separate kingdoms: a northern kingdom still called Israel (capital, Samaria) and a southern kingdom called Judah (capital, Jerusalem). Both were Jewish, but had separate stories moving forward.

## Tuesday, May 8: Micah 1:10-16

Has Micah depressed you yet? So far, he has had only bad news for the people of Samaria (the northern kingdom of Israel) and Jerusalem (the southern kingdom of Judah). In Micah 2 he will help us understand why God is so angry with His people.

God's people were blessed to be a blessing. Way back in Genesis 12:2, God says to Abram, *"I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others."* God's call on the people of Israel was that they were to be His people. And as His people, bearing the image of God, they were to love, care for, and bring His good news into all the earth. They failed miserably. The result will be exile in Babylon. During Micah's lifetime the northern kingdom of Israel will fall. Shortly after his death, Judah would capitulate. The Bible sees exile as judgement upon Israel and Judah for their sins.

One of the themes Micah highlights for us is that God takes sin seriously. We know that when we, personally, sin, it's a bad thing. We need to confess it to God. We need to change our ways (repent). And, if we have hurt someone else, we need to confess, apologise, and try to rebuild the relationship.

Spend some time in reflection: is there anything in your life that is "sin" in God's eyes? Will you confess it? Will you do what you need to do to make things right? *"If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness"* (1 John 1:8-9).

However, the prophets highlight that when we, as a community/nation/culture, sin we also have to confess it to God. We need to change our collective ways (repent). If we have hurt someone or a group, we need to confess, apologise, and try to rebuild the relationship. It is good, for instance, for us as a nation to have apologised to indigenous people for the evils of the residential schools and to seek to help First Nations become thriving communities. This is the kind of justice God calls us to through the prophets.

Spend some time in reflection: is there anything in our society that is "sin" in God's eyes? Talk with God about it? Is there anything you can do to begin to make things right?

*You are God and I praise you;  
you are the Lord and I acclaim you;  
You are the eternal Father;  
all creation worships you.  
To you all angels, all the powers of heaven,  
cherubim and seraphim sing in endless praise,  
'Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might;  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.'  
Throughout the whole world the holy church proclaims you:  
Father of majesty unbounded;  
Your true and only Son, worthy of all worship;  
And the Holy Spirit, our advocate and guide.  
You, Christ are the King of glory, the eternal Son of the Father.  
When you became man to set us free,  
you did not abhor the virgin's womb.  
You overcame the sting of death  
and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.  
You are seated at God's right hand in glory;  
we believe that you will come and be our judge.  
Come, Lord, and help your people,  
bought with your own blood.  
Help your people be your body, in love and mercy,  
Bringing your hope into world.  
Bring us with your saints to glory everlasting. Amen.*

Te Deum, 4<sup>th</sup> Century

## Wednesday, May 9: Micah 2:1-11

I was reading the news this morning. It's business as usual.

- Certain world leaders are embroiled in personal ethical scandals.
- Nations, businesses, and oligarchs are obsessed with "them first" – whatever will bring them the most economic gain, at whatever cost to others, is best. Everyone else is collateral damage.
- The #MeToo movement and racial tensions highlight that abuse and inequalities based on gender, race, age, and ability are rampant.
- Children, women, and the elderly are victimized in conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.
- Homes in Canadian cities are unaffordable.
- Those who speak out about this greed and corruption are "bad people" with "fake news."

Not much has changed since Micah spoke to his people in 2700 years ago!

- They covet fields and grab them, find homes and take them.
- They bully their neighbor and their families, seeing people only for what they can get out of them.
- They rob unsuspecting people out for an evening stroll.
- They take their coats off the backs of the vulnerable, like soldiers who plunder the defenseless.
- They drive widows out of their homes.
- They make victims of poor children, leaving them vulnerable to violence and vice.
- "Don't preach about this evil," say the preachers. "Preach things that support the wealthy/powerful."

There are eerily familiar echoes that reverberate in our times, aren't there?

The message people want to hear, of course, is that everything is good (2:6); we will be richer than ever before (2:11). God's people will be great again! The Jewish people back then were certain God would never allow anything bad to happen to them; they were His chosen people. Many North Americans share the same values: the important thing is to get rich, accumulate more, and look after ourselves first. In God we trust.

What is Micah's message to God's people? *"God has had enough. He says, 'I have some plans of my own: Disaster because of this interbreeding evil! Your necks are on the line. You're not walking away from this. It's doomsday for you. Mocking ballads will be sung of you, and you yourselves will sing the blues: "Our lives are ruined, our homes and lands auctioned off. They take everything, leave us nothing! All is sold to the highest bidder." And there'll be no one to stand up for you, no one to speak for you before God and his jury'"* (2:3-5 The Message translation).

God does not value greed. God does not reward a "me-first" attitude. God does not tolerate powerful people taking advantage of weaker people. God is not pleased when the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. Inequality and vice – locally and globally – is abhorrent to Him.

As we look at the news today, we struggle to stand outside of the cultural values of our time. We get sucked into the me-first, accumulate-more-and-more, to hell-with-the-rest-of-the-world, make-my-investment-grow attitudes. We cannot change the world. But we can make ethical choices in our lives. We can make sure we speak about and treat people from other races with dignity and respect. We can support fair trade initiatives. In small ways we can choose to live justly. We can choose to "love our neighbour."

*Jesus, You who called me to hope in your Name,  
which is the first of all creation,  
open the eyes of my heart that I may know you,  
who alone remains highest among the highest and holiest among the holy.  
And open my arms that I may live for you  
With generosity, mercy, and love.  
May your love for me be reflected in my love for those around me.  
Amen*

Clement of Rome (1<sup>st</sup> Century)

**Thursday, May 10: Micah 2:12-13**

There is good news: God loves His people. He will not abandon them.

They will go through hard times. They will be conquered and go into exile, but eventually God will rescue them.

In Ezekiel, written during the exile in Babylon, God says this: *"As shepherds go after their flocks when they get scattered, I'm going after my sheep. I'll rescue them from all the places they've been scattered to in the storms. I'll bring them back from foreign peoples, gather them from foreign countries, and bring them back to their home country. I'll feed them on the mountains of Israel, along the streams, among their own people. I'll lead them into lush pasture so they can roam the mountain pastures of Israel, graze at leisure, feed in the rich pastures on the mountains of Israel. And I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep. I myself will make sure they get plenty of rest. I'll go after the lost, I'll collect the strays, I'll doctor the injured, I'll build up the weak ones and oversee the strong ones so they're not exploited"* (Ezekiel 34:11-16 *The Message*). Notice the theme of justice and God's concern for the weak ones.

God continues: *"And as for you, my dear flock, I'm stepping in and judging between one sheep and another, between rams and goats. Aren't you satisfied to feed in good pasture without taking over the whole place? Can't you be satisfied to drink from the clear stream without muddying the water with your feet? Why do the rest of my sheep have to make do with grass that's trampled down and water that's been muddied?"* Therefore, God, the Master, says: *"I myself am stepping in and making things right between the plump sheep and the skinny sheep. Because you forced your way with shoulder and rump and butted at all the weaker animals with your horns till you scattered them all over the hills, I'll come in and save my dear flock, no longer let them be pushed around. I'll step in and set things right between one sheep and another"* (34:17-22). God does not tolerate greed, bullying, throwing-your-weight-around, lack of compassion for those in need.

In Ezekiel 34:23-24, God looks forward to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus: *"I'll appoint one shepherd over them all: my servant David. He'll feed them. He'll be their shepherd. And I, God, will be their God. My servant David will be their prince"* (Jesus is of the line of David, Matthew 1:1-17).

Jesus picks up on both Micah and Ezekiel's words when He describes Himself as the "Good Shepherd" (John 10:11-18). Jesus has come to save us. He saves us **from** sin and death. He saves us **to** a life of worship, love, and compassion, being His blessing to the world around us. How can I be a blessing to someone today?

*My eternal Savior, you alone are Almighty.  
You are the Lord, the God of all beings, and the God of my fathers.  
You, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,  
are merciful, compassionate, long-suffering, and rich in mercy.  
To you every heart is opened, and every secret thought is revealed.  
My soul cries out to you; my hope rests confidently in you.  
You have created the world to be a battlefield, where my faith will be tried.  
Yet you have also opened to me, and to all the gate of mercy,  
and made clear that the possession of riches is not everlasting  
beauty will not last;  
and strength and power are easily gone.  
Only the fruit of true faith will last:  
the only thing that will last and take us to heaven,  
is the possession of a life of true faith.  
Lord, strengthen my faith and empower my service.  
Lord, hear my prayers as I battle on.  
You know, too, the prayers I have not spoken,  
for your Spirit reaches even into my heart,  
and your all-seeing gaze searches my thoughts, Lord.  
Lord, have mercy on me.  
Amen.*

Apostolic Constitutions (4<sup>th</sup> Century)

## Friday, May 11: Micah 3

Micah is riled up. *"But me – I'm filled with God's power, filled with God's Spirit of justice and strength, ready to confront Jacob's crime and Israel's sin"*(3:8). This is a man on a mission.

The leaders of Judah – both the politicians and the religious leaders – are evil. Far from defending the poor and the powerless, they have become cannibal-like, exploiting the "common" people. In particular, religious leaders collude with politicians, speaking messages that endorse the leaders' greed and make the rich feel good. Rather than fearlessly speaking the Word of God and His justice, they tell their wealthy benefactors what they want to hear. It's a good thing no religious leader does that today (Bruce writes, facetiously).

The ultimate result of the corruption and greed of the political and religious leaders will be exile and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the heart and soul of the Jewish nation and Jewish identity.

Jessica Nicholas, in her thought-provoking book, *God Loves Justice: A User-Friendly Guide to Biblical Justice and Righteousness*, writes, *"Western views of justice are primarily focused on how things should be done – laws, rules, and what should happen when laws are broken. In Hebrew thought, justice is focused on what life should be like. Justice in the Hebrew world was concerned not just with laws, but with enhancing all human life, especially the social world."* For many of us, justice is something static, entrenched in legal tomes. In contrast, biblical justice is dynamic, realistic, and practical: justice is simply how we live in God's world in a way that respects other people and God's creation, treating everyone with respect and honour.

Closely related to justice is righteousness. When we live righteously, we live justly. Nicholas goes on to say, *"It might seem that righteousness means you have to live up to God's standards, like when you are in school and have to do everything right in order to get a good grade. But a better way to think of righteousness is living inside God's intended order."* Living righteously and living justly simply mean living life as God intended it to be lived. We live His principles. When we do that, things go well. When we don't, bad things happen. God knows what we need to do to stay healthy, balanced, and free within the design of His creation. His Word is His how-to-guide for living our healthiest, most relationally rich and happy life. Staying inside His boundary lines is ultimately for our own benefit. When we go outside them, we hurt ourselves and others.

Re-read Micah 2:12-13. God makes two BIG points in these two little verses:

- 2:12 – God emphasizes His presence, protection AND the importance of community – He will keep you safe; you are part of His flock; you are part of His people. You needn't be alone – solitary sheep do not last long; sheep have safety and strength as a flock! God is with you. How can that encourage you?
- 2:13 – God's commission<sup>2</sup> – sending you into the world to be His witnesses, with His presence and power. You have a purpose – to follow Jesus into the highways and byways of life, being a blessing to others. Where is Jesus as you go out into the world (last phrase – He is leading the way)? How is that empowering? How is that "empurposing" to you today?<sup>3</sup>

*Come quickly to help me, O Lord God of my salvation,  
for the battle is great and the adversaries are powerful.  
The enemy is hostile, the invisible foe fighting through visible forms.  
Come quickly, therefore, to help me,  
and assist me through your holy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
through whom you have redeemed us all,  
through whom be glory and power to you forever and ever.  
In your strength and your power, I can endure all things.  
In your strength and your power, I can do all things.  
Amen.*

Origen of Alexandria (185-254)

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<sup>2</sup> The word "co-mission" is interesting – as God's people we are on a mission to bring His love and hope ... but we aren't in this alone – He is with us. We are co-partners in this mission. It truly is a co-mission with God and ourselves.

<sup>3</sup> "Empurposing" is a word that SHOULD exist! If "empowering" means God gives us power to handle the issues in our lives, then "empurposing" can mean that God gives us purpose for our lives – to be His witnesses in word and deed.

## Saturday, May 12: Micah 4:1-5

Is there any hope? Is there any light at the end of the tunnel? Reading the news, we're not too sure ...

Micah 4:1 literally begins, "*In days to come ...*" These verses may refer to

1. the return of the Jewish people from exile in Babylon (which began in 537 BC) **OR**
2. the coming of Jesus in the first century (Christmas) and the establishment of the church, **OR**
3. the ultimate "Day of the Lord" when Jesus returns in glory and judgment in the future.

Which is correct? We don't know. Probably ALL are, working together to complete God's purpose:

1. in part, this prophecy was fulfilled when the people rebuilt Jerusalem after the exile.
2. in part, Jesus' first coming accomplished some of this, establishing His church.
3. we still await its complete fulfillment with His second coming, in the future.

Micah 3 was about destruction. Micah 4:1-5 are about reconstruction. God rebuilds His Temple and city, Jerusalem. He brings peace. He brings reconciliation. He brings justice. Notice that this includes "many nations" – fulfilling God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12). God is a missionary God bringing all peoples together. This is not exclusively about just one nation, ethnic group, or tribe (thankfully!).

Think about how Peter's words speak about the fulfillment of this prophecy: "*You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple ... And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. As the Scriptures say, 'I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.'* ... *You are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light*" (1 Peter 2:4-9).<sup>4</sup>

We await the ultimate realization of this vision when Jesus returns. However, it is interesting to note what is important in the Kingdom of God. As we pray "*Your Kingdom come and your will be done*" how can we help to see this vision come into being in our own little worlds?

- A vision of peace between different ethnic groups (4:3): what might that mean in our community?
- A vision of "sufficiency" – everyone has enough but no one has too little or too much (4:4): what would that look like in our community?
- A vision of safety and security (4:4); what would this look like on our community?

How can I be a peacemaker? How can I live with a balance of "sufficiency" and generosity? How can I help my community be a safe place for all people, for people of all nations?

*O eternal God, King of all creation, who has brought me to this hour,  
forgive the sins which I've committed this day in thought, word, and deed.  
Cleanse, O Lord, my humble soul from every stain of flesh and spirit.  
Grant me, O Lord, to pass through the sleep of this night in peace,  
to rise from my lowly bed,  
to please your holy name all the days of my life,  
and to defeat the enemies that contend against me both bodily and spiritually.  
Deliver me, O Lord, from the vain thoughts that stain me, and from evil desires.  
For yours is the kingdom and the power, and the glory,  
of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
now and forever, and unto the ages of ages.  
Amen.*

Macarius of Egypt, 300-390

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<sup>4</sup> Peter echoes Micah's concern for justice and righteousness: "*Dear friends, I warn you ... to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world*" (1 Peter 2:11-12).

## Sunday, May 13, Mother's Day Micah 4:6-13

*"If you can't say anything good about someone, then don't say anything at all"* – good advice from my Mom.

Thankfully, Micah has some good things to say to us, too! Micah 4 is one such chapter.

The challenge with the Old Testament prophets is figuring out the time frame. Is this prophecy referring to:

1. The return of the Jewish people from exile in Babylon? **or**
2. Jesus' life, death and resurrection? **or**
3. Jesus' second coming at the end of history?

Some teachers may be adamant that somehow **they know** it means one or the other. Scripture doesn't tell us. If the Bible is our authority, we must admit *we don't know* the time frame of this vision. As in yesterday's thoughts, it may actually refer to all three, working to bring this into being. Certainly, some verses seem to be specifically about the exile in Babylon (4:9-11). But is this a description of the reestablishment of the geographical/historical kingdom of Israel, ruled by a perfect, human king? That has not happened.

Micah 4 describes a future greater than the Jewish people returning from exile (4:1-8, 13). The new kingdom described here is not a geographical/historical unit – the physical nation we call "Israel." This new kingdom is ruled directly by God: He is King. This is about the creation of the "Kingdom of God," a phrase Jesus uses repeatedly in His mission to describe His work and the church He establishes.

According to Jesus, what is the kingdom of God like? It's not a physical kingdom, but a kingdom of the heart. His Kingdom includes those of us who allow Him to be King – to rule – in our lives (from every nation on earth). The Kingdom of God is a hidden kingdom, transcending time and space, as the Holy Spirit is sovereign in ours and others' lives. When we allow His Spirit to rule in our hearts, then peace, reconciliation, justice, joy, and love result. His Kingdom comes as we let His justice and righteousness shape our hearts, AND we live it out.

This Kingdom, ruled by the Lord, Jesus, is called "the church" in the New Testament. The Greek word for "church," *ekklesia*, "literally means "called out people." We are the lame, the remnant, and the exiles assembled, gathered together by God to be His people, guided and led by our Lord (Micah 2:13).

Micah 4:6-7 are a wonderful picture of the emergence of Jesus' church – gathered together, as a faithful remnant, as a strong nation, under His lordship. Peter has prophecies like this in mind when He writes: *"You are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy"* (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Spend some time reflecting on Micah 4:6-7 and 1 Peter 2:9-10 (above). How can these images of who you are as a follower of Jesus – of who we are as the church – encourage and empower you today? What is (y)our mission? How can we live it out today?

*Jesus, You are the ever-living one.*

*Jesus, You are without beginning, like the Father, and co-eternal with the Spirit.*

*Jesus, You are He who made all things out of nothing.*

*Jesus, You are the Prince of the angels.*

*Jesus, You are He at whom the depths tremble.*

*Jesus, You are He who is covered with light as with the garment.*

*Jesus, You are He who made us, and fashioned us at birth.*

*Jesus, You are He who formed things invisible.*

*Lord Jesus, help me see You and know You as my King, my Saviour, my God!*

*Lord Jesus, help me serve You as my King, my Saviour, my God!*

*Amen.*

Hippolytus of Rome (165-235)

## Monday, May 14: Micah 5

God's church has survived persecution and corruption. The good news God is with us, His church, with justice and righteousness, in spite of His enemies and in spite of us. We will survive persecution and corruption, too.

Micah 5:1-5 make look beyond the return from exile to the coming of Jesus. As Judah is fighting for its freedom in Micah's day (5:1), God makes the point that all the kings *born in proud Jerusalem* will fail. It is the two kings *born in humble Bethlehem*<sup>5</sup> (first, David; second, the new, perfect, ideal ruler to come – the Messiah [literally "the anointed one" – Jesus]) who save the people. This clearly anticipates Jesus' birth.

Micah 5:2-6 speak of the establishment of the church, those who believe in Him from among the Israelites and others ("his brothers"). Spend some time reflecting on 5:4-5a. This is speaking about us, His people, His church. This is speaking about you. *"He will stand and shepherd his flock – you – in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they – you – will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their – your – peace."*

Micah 5b-8 might be speaking about the future of the Jewish people. Or, in context of the Messianic discussion in 5:1-5a, probably refer to the church, us. Believers, filled with the Holy Spirit – God's Kingdom – are scattered in every nation. "Assyria" represents any powers/governments/authorities that oppose God's true people, people who love Him. Even in countries where Christians are bitterly persecuted, His Kingdom is growing. Even in cultures where true Christianity is compromised, God is still at work. What an encouragement.

Recent statistics from the Baptist World Alliance show that, from 1990-2016, the number of Christians just in Baptist churches grew

- +76% in the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship
  - +122% in the Asia-Pacific Baptist Fellowship (including China and India)
  - +193% in the Union of Baptists in Latin America
  - +832% in the All Africa Baptist Fellowship
  - +1% in the European Baptist fellowship
- (North American Baptists shrank -34%, a sad comment on the health of North American churches!)

Ultimately, we know that God's kingdom will prevail in justice (Micah 5:9-15). But in the meantime, many Christians are brutally abused and killed for their faith in many countries. Pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters persecuted in various parts of the world. And pray for the health of North American churches!

Pray that God would give us wisdom to live as God's people in this crazy world ...

*May I be no man's enemy,  
and may I be the friend of that which is eternal and lasts forever.  
May I never quarrel with those nearest me: and if I do, may I be reconciled quickly.  
May I love, seek, and attain only that which is good.  
May I wish for all people's happiness and envy none.  
May I never rejoice in the ill-fortune of one who has wronged me.  
May I win no victory that harms either me or my opponent.  
May I reconcile friends who are angry with one another.  
May I, to the extent of my power, give help to all who are in need.  
May I never fail a friend who is in danger.  
When visiting those in grief or suffering, may I be able to soften their pain,  
by gentle and healing words.  
May I always keep tame that which rages within me.  
May I never discuss who is wicked and what wicked things he has done,  
but may I know good people and follow in their footsteps. Amen.*

Eusebius (3<sup>rd</sup> century)

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<sup>5</sup> *Ephrathah* is the name of the district in Judah where Bethlehem is located.

## Tuesday, May 15: Micah 6:1-8

"What does the LORD require of you?" "What does the LORD require of ME?" That is a big question!

Before we think about the answer, remember God is speaking to His people – already saved – already part of His Kingdom. This ***IS NOT*** about what I must do to be saved! We are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus. That is not something we can earn, achieve, or accomplish by our efforts, goodness, or accomplishments. It is the something we receive as God's gift. We simply trust Him, in faith. That's it.

This ***IS*** about: "So now that I am saved, how am I going to live my life?"

God reminds us that it is not about "religiosity" – doing all the right religious things. Those spiritual exercises are fantastic when offered out of thankful hearts, by those who love the Lord. But if a person is just going through "religious motions" (like offering sacrifices in the Jewish tradition, or going to church in our culture) with no love for God, or passion for His kingdom, they are meaningless and hollow.

"He has shown all you people what is good ..." It's not rocket science!

- act justly
- love mercy
- walk humbly with your God.

When Jesus was asked what are the most important commands, how did He answer?

- "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength" (is this not roughly the same thing as "walk humbly with your God"?);
- "Love your neighbour as yourself" (If we "act justly" and "love mercy" are we not doing just that?)

I love the way God's Word is so consistent. Of course, I should not be surprised.

If you believe in Jesus, you ***ARE*** saved! Spend some time prayerfully reflecting on what it means for you to

- Act justly
- Love mercy
- Walk humbly with your God

*Lord you have called us to hope in your name.  
Save those of us who are in affliction,  
have mercy on the lonely,  
raise up those who are fallen,  
be present to those who are in need,  
heal the sick,  
bring back those of your people who have gone astray.  
Feed the hungry,  
redeem the captives,  
lift up those who are weak,  
comfort the faint hearted.  
I know that I may be the vessel you use to accomplish these miracles.  
My hands are your hands, my arms are your arms, and my feet are your feet.  
Guide in all your ways of compassion and grace.  
You all are the highest among the highest,  
and the holiest among the holy.  
All glory to your name.  
Amen*

Clement of Rome (1<sup>st</sup> century)

**Wednesday, May 16: Micah 6:9-16, Galatians 5:1, 13-15**

***This week we'll think about what it means to "act justly."*** Let's be honest: our society is not perfect. In fact, it's far from perfect.

The well-to-do people of Judah think their world is great. The wealthy are doing just fine. The (equivalent to) stock markets are at all time highs. But they do not "act justly"! They short-change people ("short ephah," a measure of weight), have dishonest scales, are violent, lie, cheat ... and basically are everything but just/honest.

What forms of not "acting justly" do you see in our community? (Remember God takes injustice seriously)

Reflecting on global economic stresses, Frank Doyle writes:

*"Lord, all this financial turmoil seems to touch my prayer in two ways.*

- *Sometimes I feel moral indignation at the greed of the fat cats whose desire for ever-greater profits has exploited the weak. I hope that they may move from blindness to a sense of the real world of people, and realise the futility of their greed that wants more and more money. 'What does it profit to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of your soul?' (Mark 8:36). But I know that such indignation is not always from the good spirit; it may be mixed with an envy in which there is little charity; I may just be jealous I did not make a bundle. I need to watch it.*
- *At other times I feel fear and insecurity for myself and my loved ones. This pushes me to look at myself. Does insecurity make me more self-seeking and less caring about the needs of others, lessening my humanity, clouding my sense that people matter more than money? Or does this worldwide turmoil strengthen my compassion? Poverty is not good in itself, but where it leads to a deeper dependence on God and coexists with generosity it can be a rare grace - remember Jesus marvelling at the widow's mite (Mark 12:41-43).*

*'Trop est avare à qui Dieu ne suffit.' 'You're too greedy if God is not enough for you.'"*

Remember: we are saved by Jesus. Spend some time reflecting on your salvation through Jesus. What a wonderful gift. Celebrate His love. Give God thanks for your salvation!

Therefore: we are called to live wisely, "by the Spirit." Read Galatians 5:1, 13-15 in *The Message* translation: *"Christ has set us free to live a free life. So take your stand! Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you. ... It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don't use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that's how freedom grows. For everything we know about God's Word is summed up in a single sentence: Love others as you love yourself. That's an act of true freedom. If you bite and ravage each other, watch out—in no time at all you will be annihilating each other, and where will your precious freedom be then?"*

How do these verses in Galatians help you think through and apply Micah 6 to your life?

How can you "live justly" today?

*May God the Father bless us;  
may Christ take care of us;  
may the Holy Spirit enlighten us all the days of our life.  
May your Kingdom come  
And your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.  
The Lord be our defender and keeper of body and soul,  
both now and for ever, to the ages of ages.  
Amen*

Æthelwold (908-984)

## Thursday, May 17: Micah 7:1-7, Galatians 5:16-26

The injustice continues. What a horrible place Israel has become! The hope is in 7:7: *"But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me."*

If you are feeling like all the world is against you and times are tough, reflect on this verse. If you read the news and are depressed, meditate on this verse. Pray. And wait for God. He hears you.

Paul continues to remind us how we are to "act justly" in this crazy world. Paul writes: *"So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses."*

*"When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God."*

*"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!"*

*"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another" (Galatians 5:16-26).*

Spend some time reflecting on the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Are you becoming more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled? Or less so? Choose one or two of those fruit that you need to work on ... what can you do today to put that into practice? Pray that God would help you ...

*Lord Jesus Christ, King of Kings:  
you have power over life and death.  
You know even that which is not clear, but hard to understand.  
Even what I think and feel is not hidden from you.  
Therefore, cleanse me from my hidden sins,  
for you have seen the wrong I have done.  
As each day passes, the end of my life comes nearer,  
and my sins increase in number.  
You, Lord, my Creator, know how feeble I am:  
in my weakness, strengthen me; when I suffer, uphold me,  
and I will glorify you, my Lord and my God.  
Amen.*

Ephraem of Syria (306-373)

## Friday, May 18: Micah 7:8-20

Have you ever made a choice – a poor choice – and instantly regretted it? But the deed is done and you have to live with the consequences.

As you read through the narrative parts of the Bible, it's amazing how many people make bad choices. Then they have to deal with the consequences. In Genesis 13, Lot makes a choice – a selfish choice, eagerly putting his selfish interests before his uncle – by opting for fertile, great-looking land, but he is also choosing to live among evil people; he pays a high price. David looks out from a rooftop, sees Bathsheba bathing, and make a choice that will lead to rape, murder, and grief. Isn't it fascinating how we cannot resist the lure of "me-first," wealth, and "success" – even though they lead us into all sorts of stress and problems.

Micah's world is also a culture of evil, injustice, and me-first. But Micah sees hope. *"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."*

We live in hope: Jesus demonstrates God's love, mercy, and compassion by taking on Himself all our sins so we are completely forgiven. Isn't that great news?

Perhaps you need to spend some time confessing your sins to God? Confess them, not to wallow in them, not to be paralyzed or overwhelmed by them, and not to be consumed by them. Confess your sins to God so you can be free of them. Reflect and confess your sins so they can be, once and for all, trod underfoot and hurled into the depths of the sea. If you are a visual person, imagine each of your sins being ground into the dust or thrown into the depths of the ocean. They are gone. Finished. Dealt with. Forever.

John writes these very honest words: *"This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth."*

Then John goes on to say, *"But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness."* (1 John 1:5-9). That is great news! Confess to God whatever you need to ...

*O Lord, my God, great, eternal, wonderful in glory  
Life of all, Help to those who flee to you,  
Hope of those who cry to you,  
through your Holy Spirit cleanse me from my sins, secret and open;  
and from every thought displeasing to your goodness.  
Cleanse my body and my soul,  
my heart and my conscience.  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, create within me a pure heart and a clean soul, that,  
with perfect love and calm hope,  
I may venture confidently and fearlessly to pray to you,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

Liturgy of St. Basil (4<sup>th</sup> Century)

### **Saturday, May 19: Amos 5:18-24**

As we read the news, some of us are sure the Lord will return any time. After all, there are *"wars and insurrections, don't panic ... Nation goes to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There are great earthquakes, and there are famines and plagues in many lands"* (Lue 21:9-10). (We conveniently forget the context – Jesus said these words to specific people, in a specific place, at a specific time: all these horrific events came true in their own lifetimes).

Do we really want the Lord to return? Are we ready?

Amos, like Micah, asks hard questions and highlights hard truths for us. We are not living the just and righteous lives God wants us to. Earlier in Amos 5, God has said, *"You twist justice, making it a bitter pill for the oppressed. You treat the righteous like dirt ... How you hate honest judges! How you despise people who tell the truth! You trample the poor, stealing their grain through taxes and unfair rent. You oppress good people by taking bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts."*

God goes on to say, *"Do what is good and run from evil so that you may live! Hate evil and love what is good and turn your courts into true halls of justice."*

Amos' hard message about justice is this:

*"I hate all your show and pretense – the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies. I will not accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings. I won't even notice all your choice peace offerings. Away with your noisy hymns of praise! I will not listen to the music of your harps. Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living."*

Spend some time in self-examination before God. How can I live justly? How can I live more righteously?

*O Lord, show Your mercy to me and gladden my heart.  
I am like the man on the way to Jericho who was overtaken by robbers,  
wounded and left for dead (Luke 10:25-37).  
O Good Samaritan, come to my aid.  
I am like the sheep that went astray (Luke 15:1-7).  
O Good Shepherd, seek me out and bring me home in accord with Your will.  
I am like the proud Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14).  
O Master, make me humble and kind.  
Let me dwell in Your house all the days of my life and praise You  
for ever and ever with those who are there.  
Amen.*

Jerome (347-420)

### **Sunday, May 20: Psalm 100**

We have read some hard words in Micah over the past couple of weeks. We have seen the evil and injustice in his world, and reflected on the evil and injustice in our own.

For perspective, let's simply worship God with this wonderful psalm of praise ...

Jessica Nicholas writes, *"Delight is God's why behind the justice, righteousness, and steadfast love He practices. It's not out of frustration or obligation, but delight."* God's good will is that we know His ways, follow them, and live full, content, meaningful lives. God's justice leads us to live full, meaningful lives in community. God's justice leads us to joy, hope, peace, and love in the kind of society for which He created us.

What are the reasons for giving thanks the psalmist talks about? What are you thankful for?

List some things that you are thankful to God for – tell Him about it in your prayer today.

What are some things you are thankful to significant people for (parents, kids, spouse, friends)? Tell them about it today! Say "thank you" to someone who has made a difference in your life, today.

It is a great discipline to simply take time to be thankful ...

*Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,  
look upon me and have mercy upon me.  
You are both my Reward and my Redeemer.  
I confess my sins to you.  
Thank you for your gift of forgiveness and grace.  
I repent.  
I pray that, through your Holy Spirit, you would change my paths,  
and keep me safe from evil.  
I praise you for you have redeemed me,  
O Saviour of the world.  
For all this and more I give thanks.  
Amen.*

Iranaeus of Lyons (130-200)

## Monday, May 21: Psalm 28

What does the Lord require of me?

- To act justly: we thought about that last week.
- **To love mercy: we will think about this, this week.**
- To walk humbly with my God: next week!

Our great model for “acting justly” is God Himself – He will always do what is right, true, and just. God is also our perfect model of “mercy.” God is just: He is also merciful: He does not punish me according to what I deserve. Though I have sinned against Him, He does not condemn me. Instead, He offers me forgiveness. He offers me grace. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, He offers me mercy – a new beginning – forgiven, restored, renewed, and filled with His Spirit.

Psalm 28 is a celebration of God’s mercy. How do I experience God’s mercy?

- I can confess my sins and know His forgiveness.
- I can come with my troubles and trials, and He will get me through.

What does mercy look like in my life ...

- Mercy for others in difficult circumstances (like David in Psalm 28)? How can I help them?
- For those who have sinned against me? (“*Forgive me my trespasses as I forgive those who ...*”?)

Mother Teresa says, “*It is not enough for us to say: ‘I love God.’ I also have to love my neighbour. In the Scriptures, John says that you are a liar if you say you love God and you do not love your neighbour. How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbour whom you see, whom you touch, with whom you live? And he uses a very big word: ‘You are a liar.’ It is one of those words that is frightening to read and yet it is really true.*” How can I live out God’s mercy?

*O God of infinite mercy and boundless majesty,  
whom no distance of space nor length of time can separate from those for whom you care;  
I trust in you – be with me everywhere,  
and through all the ways in which I am to go.  
May you be my constant guide and my companion.  
May no adversity harm me,  
no difficulty oppose me;  
may all situations in my life turn out blessed, by your Spirit;  
that by the help of your right hand,  
whatever I have truly needed,  
may quickly be received with a good response;  
and that, whoever I need to be,  
I may be shaped by your guiding hand,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

Gelasian Sacramentary (5<sup>th</sup> Century)

## Tuesday, May 22: Psalm 86

It is good to remember God’s mercy. During periods in our history, as wars raged, people suffered, and nations struggled, I’m sure people prayed prayers like Psalm 86, asking God to protect and save His people.

We often think of salvation in purely spiritual terms (our sins are forgiven; we go to heaven when we die). This psalm reminds us God’s salvation can be very practical, too. God can save us from our enemies. The story of world history – if we choose to open our eyes to see it – is that God does, ultimately, ensure that His kingdom comes and His will is done, despite human evil. Having said that, God does give humanity a lot of freedom to do a lot of evil, wreak a lot of havoc, and cause a lot of pain. He lets us reap what we sow. But in the end His kingdom prevails over evil.

In Micah’s day, God preserved the Jewish people, despite hideous persecution.

Throughout history, despite persecution and corruption, God has preserved His church. God saves us despite our own stupidity, folly, and poor choices.

Are you going through difficult times? Pray Psalm 86. This is God's mercy. "*Loving mercy*" includes knowing God's mercy in my life. Give thanks. Be patient. Know God's presence and peace through your hard times.

Do you have a friend or family member going through stress? You can be a messenger of God's mercy by being a friend – coming alongside, encouraging, helping, phoning, caring. You can be God's mercy. "*Loving mercy*" includes being God's "angel of mercy" (did you know the word "angel" literally translated means "messenger"?).

*"Do you want to do something beautiful for God? There is a person who needs you. This is your chance."*  
(Mother Teresa)

*I give you thanks, yes, more than thanks, O Lord our God,  
the Father of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ,  
for all your goodness at all times and in all places.  
You, O Lord, have shielded, rescued, helped,  
and guided me all the days of my life,  
and brought me to this hour.*

*I pray and beseech you, merciful God,  
to grant in your goodness that I may spend this holy day  
and all the days of my life without sin, in fullness of joy,  
health, safety, holiness, and reverence of you.*

*Drive away from me and from your church  
all envy, all fear, all temptation, all the influence of Satan,  
and all the snares of the wicked, O Lord.  
Whatever sin I commit in thought, word, or deed,  
please pardon in your goodness and mercy.*

*Please do not leave me, O Lord;  
nor lead me not into temptation,  
but deliver me from the evil one and from his works  
through the grace, mercy, and love of your only begotten Son.  
I pray that you would bless your church, O Lord,  
with what is good and right.*

*Through your beloved son, Jesus, our glorious Savior,  
be glory and power to you,  
in your most holy, good, and life-giving Spirit,  
now, from this day forth, and forever more.  
Amen.*

Liturgy of St. Mark (2<sup>nd</sup> Century)

### **Wednesday, May 23: Luke 5:12-16**

Peter Greaves, a contemporary leprosy patient, reflects, "*I was recognizably human; I had at least the usual complement of legs and arms; but I might have been some shameful piece of garbage. There was something indecent about the way in which I was being furtively shuffled out of life.*"

Lepers were the 'untouchables' of the first century (and still are in parts of the world where the disease is prevalent). Lepers were completely cut off from "normal" society, family and friends – exiled to leper colonies. None of us can appreciate the experience of having all human contact severed.

What did Jesus do? He *reached out* and *touched* this man. What a wonderful picture of mercy – for this leper, having someone touch him was an incredible gift of love.

Dr. Bob Cochrane, a Scottish missionary doctor in India over 50 years ago, pioneered medical treatment with lepers. He used to say, *"I'm not interested in Christianity. I'm interested in Christ, which is an entirely different matter."* *"Citing the example of Jesus, who had broken cultural taboos by reaching out to victims of leprosy, Cochrane led a campaign against the prevailing social stigma. He sent shock waves through the medical community by hiring leprosy patients to work in his home, one as his personal cook and the other as his gardener."*<sup>6</sup> What a wonderful picture of mercy. To treat lepers like human beings who can live meaningful lives is an incredible gift of love. To build relationships with "untouchables" is a beautiful act of mercy.

Who are the "lepers" – the "untouchables" – in our culture? How can I show them mercy?

*"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can"* (John Wesley).

*Almighty God, before whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden ...  
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
That we may love you, perfectly,  
And love our neighbour perfectly.  
All glory to your Name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.  
Amen*

Gregorian Sacramentary (6<sup>th</sup> Century)

#### **Thursday, May 24: Luke 5:17-26**

Mercy is practical. A paralyzed fellow's friends bring him to Jesus. And Jesus heals him. We may not have the gift of healing like this, but any practical help is a tremendous blessing to those in need (faithful servants, such as Mother Teresa, model this practical mercy so beautifully for us). "Love," as Jesus embodied and taught it, is not a warm feeling. God's love is love in action. God's love has hands and feet attached to it. So, if I "love mercy," I don't just "feel" warm and compassionate – I do something merciful!

Mercy also sees the spiritual root of the problem. Yes, this man needs to walk; Jesus provides that very practical help. But He also sees into the man's soul and knows he needs God's forgiveness and love. Being able to walk – but not having a soul cleansed and forgiven by God – is not enough. He needs to know God.

Through Jesus' love, I can help people practically. But out of mercy and love, I can also help people meet Jesus, who can bring spiritual healing.

Historically, some Christians have mostly emphasized social concern and justice – if we just feed, clothe, educate, provide health care for people, we have done all we need to do. Other Christians have just emphasized spirituality – people only need to know Jesus as Saviour; we should not get involved in practical things like medical care, housing, agriculture, justice, etc. This story makes it clear that, for Jesus, social justice (practical acts of mercy) and evangelism (Jesus' message of God's love, forgiveness, and the kingdom of God) are not exclusive. They are not either/or. They are both/and. Both are essential aspects of God's mercy.

Our mission organization, Canadian Baptist Ministries<sup>7</sup> (and other groups, like SIM) emphasizes both of these components. It's not either/or; it's both/and. As our church seeks to be missional in our community, we want to share our faith with our friends, neighbours, families, etc. **AND** providing practical help through visiting, caring, providing community, the Soup Kitchen, Food Banks, Days for Girls, etc.

*"Charity (we might say "mercy") begins today. Today somebody is suffering. Today somebody is in the street. Today somebody is hungry. Our work is for today; yesterday has gone; tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today to make Jesus known, loved, served, fed, clothed, sheltered. Do not wait for tomorrow. Tomorrow we will not have them if we do not feed them today"* (Mother Teresa). Who can you help, practically, today? Who can you share your faith in Jesus with today?

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Brand & Philip Yancey, *The Gift of Pain*, p. 88.

<sup>7</sup> You may wish to check out CBM's ministries – both evangelism and justice – at [www.cbmin.org](http://www.cbmin.org)

*May God the Father, the eternal High Priest Jesus Christ,  
and the Holy Spirit, build us up in faith and truth and love,  
And grant us a place among the saints  
with all those who believe on our Lord Jesus Christ.  
We pray for all saints (those who believe in Jesus),  
for kings and rulers, for the enemies of the cross of Christ.  
And for ourselves we pray that our fruit may abound  
– that we may feed and bless a starving world –  
a world starved for Jesus,  
and a world starved for holy, practical love.  
May we all be made perfect in Christ Jesus, our Lord.  
Amen.*

Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna 69-155 (martyred)

### **Friday, May 25: Luke 5:27-32**

Lepers were the 'untouchables' of the first century. Tax collectors were the 'unlikeables' of the first century. It's not just that people back then didn't like paying taxes any more than we do. In Jesus' day, tax collectors were Jews working for the Romans; they were enemy collaborators. Even worse, while the Romans required tax collectors to collect a specific lump sum from their region, they allowed tax collectors to charge as large a "fee" as they wished. So they routinely gouged their countrymen for exorbitant commissions. They became fabulously wealthy while putting others into unpayable debt (see the story of Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1-12).

But Jesus shows mercy, even to the enemy. *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:43-45). Does that irritate you? It bothers me! If I were a Jew back then, dealing with a tax collector, I wouldn't like it at all. I would have said to Jesus, *"Fine – you do it. Not me."*

Jesus did do it. He showed mercy by restoring relationships with tax collectors.

Ultimately, Jesus demonstrated what it means to "love your enemies" on the cross. When under attack, He did not raise an army to defend Himself. He did not whip out an AR-15 assault rifle or even a concealed handgun. What He did do was say to His enemies – those who falsely accused him, who ensured justice miscarried, who hammered the nails into his hands and feet, who mocked and laughed at Him – *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"* (Luke 23:34). Mercy. Mercy. Mercy.

*"Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbour,"* advises C.S. Lewis. *"Act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less."* I find if I actively do pray for those who annoy me, I become much more compassionate, much less irritated, and can "get over it" so much easier.

Try Jesus' advice. Pray for those you don't like. Do them a good turn. You will find your attitude change. And you will find that your life is so much more joyful as you let go of all those old grudges.

When I am angry with someone, it usually doesn't hurt them at all, but it eats me alive. It only hurts me. I need to let go. Paradoxically, forgiveness is more blessed to give than to receive.

*O God, be all my love, all my hope, all my striving ...  
Let my thoughts and words flow from you,  
My daily life be in you,  
And every breath I take be for you.  
O God, fill your church with love and hope ...  
Let all of our thoughts and words flow from you,  
Our daily life be in you,  
And every step we make be for you. Amen.*

John Cassian (360-435)

## Saturday, May 26: Genesis 16

This is an interesting story about faith, grace, and mercy. God has promised Abram and Sarai descendants (see Genesis 12:1-3), but so far nothing. No children. Do they believe God's promise?

I can understand Abram and Sarai's impatience – I am not a patient person either. How often do I, in my impatience, do stupid things, too?

Later in the Bible, Abram is held up as a shining example of faith (Romans 3, Hebrews 11:8-12), but he is far from perfect. This is one of his least noble moments. Isn't it encouraging to know that even those closest to God's heart – people like Abram and David – make some **BIG** mistakes? And yet God forgives them and continues to work in and through them in wonderful ways. What a merciful God! (FYI, it would still be another **fourteen** long years of waiting until their son Isaac would be born ...)

Unfortunately, Sarai is anything but merciful to Hagar. She mistreats Hagar. I totally understand Sarai's frustration and anger, too. I may be able to empathize with Sarai, but that does not excuse her (or my) behaviour. I am called to be merciful and gracious to others, whether I feel like it or not, whether it is fair or not, whether I like them or not. If I love God – and love His mercy for me – I need to extend that same unconditional love and mercy to others. *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful"* (Luke 6:36). That's not easy. Let's be honest about that. Not being easy, though, is no excuse. I'm still called to live it.

God is so merciful. His further promise to Hagar is proof of this. His mercy goes on and on. Our challenge is to love mercy just as much as God does.

His promise is this: *"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy"* (Matthew 5:7). Lord, help me.

*O Lord, fill me with hope for Your heavenly blessings;  
O Lord, let me live Your eternal life;  
O Lord, if I have sinned in my mind or thought, in word deed, forgive me.  
O Lord, deliver me from every ignorance and heedlessness,  
from pettiness of the soul and stony hardness of heart;  
O Lord, deliver me from every temptation;  
O Lord, enlighten my heart darkened by evil desires;  
O Lord, I, being a human being, have sinned.  
Lord God, please forgive me in Your loving-kindness,  
for You know the weakness of my soul.  
O Lord, send down Your grace to help me, that I may glorify Your holy Name;  
O Lord my God, even if I have yet done nothing good in Your sight,  
grant me, according to Your grace, that I may make a start in doing good.  
O Lord, sprinkle on my heart the dew of Your grace;  
O Lord, receive me in repentance;  
O Lord, never leave me;  
O Lord, save me from temptation;  
O Lord, grant me pure thoughts;  
O Lord, grant me tears of repentance, remembrance of death, and the sense of peace;  
O Lord, grant me mindfulness to confess my sins;  
O Lord, grant me humility, charity, and obedience;  
O Lord, grant me tolerance, generosity, and gentleness;  
O Lord, implant in me the root of all blessings: the worship of You in my heart;  
O Lord, help me love You with all my heart and soul,  
and that I may obey Your will in all things;  
O Lord, shield me from evil persons and devils and passions and all other lawless matters;  
O Lord, who knows Your creation and that which you have willed for it;  
may Your will also be fulfilled in me, a sinner,  
for You are blessed forevermore. Amen.*

John Chrysostom (347-407)

**Sunday, May 27: Read Luke 10:25-37**

- How is this a story of God's mercy?
- Mercy for one another?
- How can this story teach you today?

Notice the context of this story. *"One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: 'Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?'"* Jesus replies citing two key Old Testament principles, *"'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

In Matthew and Mark, Jesus emphasizes the same two commands, but in a slightly different context: *"One of them, an expert in religious law, **tried to trap him** with this question: 'Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?'"*(Matthew 22:35-36). Loving God and loving our neighbour are the most important commandments in the Law AND keys to eternal life. No excuses. This is crucial stuff.

In Luke 10, the lawyer wants to wiggle out of his responsibility so he asks Jesus to specify who his neighbour is. He is expecting to hear his neighbour is only his Jewish, adult, male, close relative/friend. Certainly not a non-Jew, or non-male non-person (which is how Jewish men saw anyone non-Jewish, non-adult, and non-male). In particular, *"Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans"*(John 4:9).

Notice the victim in this story is an adult Jewish male. The hero is the non-person, the Samaritan. Jesus is deliberately challenging the lawyer's racism, prejudice, and pre-conceptions about many things, including that "other" person. James writes, *"Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?"*(James 4:11-12).

A neighbour is simply someone who shows a fellow human being mercy (Luke 10:37).

Jesus ends by telling the lawyer, *"Go and do the same."* What is Jesus saying to me?

*We ask You, all-merciful Father, and Your only-begotten Son  
made man for our sake, crucified and glorified for us,  
to send upon us from his treasure-house the Holy Spirit  
who rested upon You in all His fullness:  
the Spirit of wisdom, enabling us to relish the fruit of the tree of life, which is indeed Yourself;  
the Spirit of understanding:  
to enlighten our perceptions;  
the Spirit of prudence:  
enabling us to follow in Your footsteps;  
the Spirit of strength:  
to withstand our adversary's onslaught;  
the Spirit of knowledge:  
to distinguish good from evil by the light of Your holy teaching;  
the Spirit of holiness:  
to clothe ourselves with charity and mercy;  
the Spirit of faithfulness:  
to withdraw from all ill-doing and live quietly in awe of Your eternal majesty.  
These are the things for which we petition.  
Grant them for the honor of Your holy name,  
to which, with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  
be all honor and glory, thanksgiving,  
renown, and lordship for ever and ever.  
Amen.*

Bonaventure (1221-1274)

## Monday, May 28: Genesis 17

What does the Lord require of me?

- To act justly: we thought about that two weeks ago.
- To love mercy: we thought about this last week.
- **To walk humbly with my God: this week.**

Our great model for "acting justly" is God Himself: He will always do what is right and true. God is also our perfect model of "mercy." In His justice, God is also merciful: He does not punish me according to what I deserve, instead He offers me grace and mercy through Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus, when He washed His disciples' feet, said, "*I have set you and example that you should do as I have done for you*" (John 13:15). We are to show mercy to one another.

We are called to walk humbly with God. What does it mean to "*walk with God*"? Throughout the Bible, God reminds His people that He "walked" with them out of Egypt and through the wilderness, and continues to walk with them. He has never left them. He has always been there; He is still always there; He is always faithful.

How about the Israelites in Micah's day? Do they "*walk with God*"? Periodically they come to the Temple making a big production of their gifts and offerings. But their religion is mostly a matter of following rules and bringing routine gifts. There is no sense of continual "*walking with God*," just occasional formal, ritual visits to the Temple. Their daily lives show no evidence of being touched, shaped, or renewed by the Spirit of God.

Abram, despite his failings (as in Genesis 16), sincerely tries to walk with God. The story of his life is of leaving his old home in Haran and, in faith, walking with God. For over two decades he believes God will give Sarai and him a child (true – he stumbles, in his impatient, impetuous relationship with Hagar): He walks with God. It is now 24 years after God's promise (in Genesis 12:1-3) and Abraham is still faithful: He walks with God

What does it mean for you to walk with God? Do you think of your life that way? If so, how does it shape how you live? If not, how might you live differently if you consciously tried "walking with God"?

Try it, today. Imagine God is walking with you everywhere (He actually does, by His Spirit): how will you relate to others, make choices, invest time, spend money? Ask God for His patience, wisdom, strength, comfort, guidance, and resolve.

*Lord, teach me to seek You,  
and reveal Yourself to me when I seek You.  
For I cannot seek You, unless You first teach me,  
nor find You, unless You first reveal Yourself to me.  
Let me seek You in longing, and long for You in seeking.  
Let me find You in love, and love You in finding.  
May I walk this moment and all moments with You.  
Amen.*

Ambrose (337-397)

## Tuesday, May 29: Proverbs 3:1-18

God wants us to "walk with" Him on the paths of life: "*in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight*" (Proverbs 3:6). But we can "walk with" someone in different ways.

For instance, I can go for a walk around Henderson Lake with Marianne in different ways:

- I could walk ahead of her, behind her, even beside her, but never talk with her, listen to her, or interact with her. If my real priority is the "**walk**" itself – accomplishing the goal of getting around the lake; who I'm with (even if I'm with anyone at all) may be incidental.
- **Or** we could walk around the lake and we could listen and talk. We could share our thoughts and minds. We could share our experiences and plans, our worries and concerns, our hopes and dreams. The real issue would be the "**with**" – the fact that it is Marianne that I'm with, that we are spending

time together, sharing our lives with one another. The destination would be incidental (Henderson Lake? Our back lane? It wouldn't really matter); the journey is the important part.

How do you walk with God?

- Is the main focus of your life getting somewhere (work-wise? money-wise? health-wise? family-wise?). For many of us, the destination is the important thing – a promotion, a secure retirement, good health, raising the kids. But how are you walking in the meantime? Who are you walking with? Are you really walking alone? Is the fact that He is with you (Matthew 28:20) incidental to your life?
- **Or** is the really important thing **who** you are walking with? Whether you are at school, work, home, travelling, parenting, or resting, God is with you. He is less concerned with what you are accomplishing than who you are becoming. He is most concerned with getting to know and you getting to know Him. The destination may be incidental (your specific job, home, plans); the journey is the important part.

The challenge from Scripture is that your journey is more important than your destination.

Proverbs 3 gives you wisdom for your journey – how you can walk with God. Spend some time reflecting on these verses. Who does God want you to be? How can you walk with God to get here?

*Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,  
that my thoughts may all be holy.  
Act in me, O Holy Spirit,  
that my work, too, may be holy.  
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,  
that I love but what is holy.  
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,  
to defend all that is holy.  
Guide me, O Holy Spirit,  
that my walk might be holy.  
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,  
that I always may be holy.  
Amen.*

Augustine (354-430)

### **Wednesday, May 30: Deuteronomy 10:12-22**

Micah 6:8 does not simply say "walk with God;" it says "walk **humbly** with God." The Hebrew word "(t)sana" – "humbly" – occurs only in this verse in the entire Old Testament. As scholars have tried to translate it into English they have come up with words like "modestly," "circumspectly," "guardedly," "carefully," "advisedly," "sensibly," "reflectively," "prudently," and "with discernment."

Years ago, I took a course on the gospels with Tom (NT) Wright, a New Testament scholar who I respect tremendously. If I had had opportunity to go for a walk with him (alas, I didn't), what would that walk have looked like? Would I have walked ahead/behind/beside him, but never talked with him? Of course not. I would have wanted to walk "**with**" that fellow. It would not have mattered where we walked (downtown, along a river, up a hillside); the journey would have been the important part.

**How** would we have walked? Would I have talked and talked about myself, my successes, my opinions, and what a good person I am? Or would I have mostly listened. Would I have asked questions? Would I have taken the opportunity to learn from a wiser person? Would I have walked (t)sana – humbly? You bet!

Imagine you have the opportunity to go for a walk with someone you respect tremendously (whoever that is). What would the walk look like? The destination would be irrelevant, wouldn't it? The journey would be the real issue. You would walk (t)sana, wouldn't you? – enjoying the wisdom and conversation of your companion?

In Deuteronomy 10:12-22 and Micah 6:8, God is saying, "Walk with me. Walk (t)sana with me. It doesn't matter where we're going. It matters that we're going together." It's an invitation to a journey. In Genesis 2:8, there

is a wonderful picture of God, walking in the garden of Eden in the cool of the day, looking for Adam and Eve, to walk with them. It wouldn't have mattered where. But it sure would have been wonderful to walk with God, wouldn't it? To listen to Him. To hear His counsel. Wouldn't it be great to go for a walk with God today?

The astounding truth of the Bible is that God does want to walk with you! Today. In fact, He does walk with you! Today. Everyday. Every moment. Everywhere.

Just as God walked with the Israelites constantly out of Egypt and through the wilderness, so God walks with us, constantly, as we journey through our week in Lethbridge or wherever we are. If we choose to recognize Him. If we choose to be still. If we choose to listen to Him.

Am I too busy trying to get somewhere, do something, or finish some project to notice **WHO** is walking beside me every moment of every day? Am I talking too much and listening to Jesus too little?

Do I need to walk – *humbly, modestly, sensibly, circumspectly, guardedly, carefully, advisedly, reflectively, prudently, with discernment* – with Jesus – today?

*Take, Lord, and receive all my freedom,  
my memory,  
my understanding,  
my entire will,  
all I have and call my own.  
You have given all to me.  
To you, Lord, I return it.  
Everything I am and have is yours;  
do with it what you will.  
Give me only your love and your grace for the journey.  
You are all I need.  
You are enough for me.  
Amen*

Ignatius (521-597)

### Thursday, May 31: Psalm 119:1-16

Psalm 119 is a song in praise of God and His Word, Scripture. The funny symbols/words dividing the psalm every 8 verses in most translations, are the letters of the Hebrew alphabet (the Hebrew equivalents of "A, B, C, D" etc.). In the original Hebrew, the first word of each of the 22 sections begins with each letter, in order, of the Hebrew alphabet. Today we are reading the "A" and "B" sections.

The theme of the entire psalm is 119:1: "*Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD.*" Life is a journey, a long walk (to quote the title of a Eugene Peterson book, life is *A long obedience in the same direction*). And if we walk according to the law of the Lord/God's principles (if we love the Lord your God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength; love our neighbour as yourself) – if we walk humbly with God – things are more likely to go well for us than if we don't. And society will be better for our humble, honest, faithful walk with God, too.

I appreciate the psalmist's honesty in 119:5 ("*Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees*"). He aspires to walk with integrity, holiness, and purity, but it is difficult. He fails. Notice, however, that he doesn't use this as an excuse, rather an inspiration to keep on trying and learning ("*I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws*" [119:7]).

I am not going to be instantly perfect at walking humbly with God – I will stumble along the way – but I need to keep learning and keep moving forward. How can I do that?

- By seeking to live according to God's ways – making that choice and having that resolve (v.9);
- By asking for God's help – I need His Spirit's strength and guidance (v.10);
- By internalizing God's truth into my heart – allowing Him to fill all my life (v.11);

- By celebrating God's truth as joy-full and liberating expressions of His love – not seeing His law as petty restrictions that limit my enjoyment or fulfillment (vs.12-14);
- By taking time to meditate and think hard on what God's words mean in my circumstances (v.15);
- By diligently reading His word and praying – keeping at it even when I don't want to (v.16).

What is God saying to you?

*O Good Shepherd, seek me out,  
and bring me home to Your fold again.  
Deal favourably with me according to Your good pleasure,  
till I may dwell in Your house all the days of my life,  
and praise You forever and ever with them that are there.  
Lord, You have given us your Word for a light to shine upon our path;  
grant us so to meditate on that Word,  
and to follow its teaching,  
that we may find in it the light that shines  
more and more until the perfect day;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen*

Jerome (347-420)

### Friday, June 1: Psalm 119:97-112

We're skipping ahead in Psalm 119 (you are welcome to read the intervening verses). 119:97-104 speak about the wisdom I can gain from walking humbly with God and reflecting on His Word, for my life's journey.

I can learn a lot from good authors, seminars, speakers, TV personalities, and even pastors, but ultimately God's Word, the Bible, is the best source of wisdom. I need to keep going back to Scripture, first. These other teachers and pastors – good though they may be – cannot satisfy me like God can. Do read good books and listen to good teachers, but don't rely on them. Never let them replace the Bible. This is why I always want us to be reading Scripture in these guides, not reading some other book or author.

Read and listen to Scripture, the Word of God, first.

Think about the imagery in Psalm 119:105. How have you found this to be true in your life?

Are you walking through some dark places? How can God's presence help you through (read Psalm 23:4 together with this verse; Psalm 23:4 literally reads "*even though I walk through the darkest valley*"<sup>8</sup>).

Notice that walking humbly with God does not guarantee that things will be easy for us (119:107-110). In Psalm 23, David still goes through the dark valley and he still has enemies. But with a steadfast commitment, resolve, and determination – and the power and presence of God – we can persevere. God gets us through.

While God gifts us with His Spirit to empower and strengthen us, notice the importance of *our* choices and *our* determination of will: "**My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end**" (119:112). When you are tempted to compromise, give up, or get too busy doing other things, **get stubborn with yourself!** Set your heart, resolutely, on keeping God's decrees to the very end. Don't let yourself off easy! Don't make up excuses. Keep committed to constant and never-ending improvement, following God's way. Finish well.

Let's use Psalm 23 as our prayer:

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<sup>8</sup> The Hebrew in Psalm 23:4 does **not** actually say "*the valley of the shadow of death*." In Hebrew it literally reads, "*the valley of deep shadow*." "*The valley of shadows*" has been taken (and thus translated) as a metaphor for death, as in Job 10:21-22. However, the English words "of death" have been added by translators; they are not there in original Hebrew texts. Truthfully, Psalm 23:4 is about walking through **any** dark times – life-threatening or not – as in the Israelites wandering in the darkness of the wilderness during the exodus (Jeremiah 2:6). The BIG theme of Psalm 23:4 is God's protection and guidance, whether the challenge be death or not!

*The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.  
 He lets me rest in green meadows;  
 he leads me beside peaceful streams.  
 He renews my strength.  
 He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name.  
 Even when I walk through the darkest valley,  
 I will not be afraid,  
 for you are close beside me.  
 Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.  
 You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies.  
 You honor me by anointing my head with oil.  
 My cup overflows with blessings.  
 Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me  
 all the days of my life,  
 and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.  
 Amen*

**Saturday, June 2: Ephesians 4:17-32**

As the people of God, we are called to live by God's standards, not the standards of culture around us.

Paul challenges us to think about the before and after of coming to faith in Jesus. How should faith in Jesus change us?

What aspects of this passage challenge you most? Why?

Let's reread it in *The Message* translation (a different translation helps us think about a passage in new ways):

*"And so I insist—and God backs me up on this—that there be no going along with the crowd, the empty-headed, mindless crowd. They've refused for so long to deal with God that they've lost touch not only with God but with reality itself. They can't think straight anymore. Feeling no pain, they let themselves go in sexual obsession, addicted to every sort of perversion.*

*"But that's no life for you. You learned Christ! My assumption is that you have paid careful attention to him, been well instructed in the truth precisely as we have it in Jesus. Since, then, we do not have the excuse of ignorance, everything—and I do mean everything—connected with that old way of life has to go. It's rotten through and through. Get rid of it! And then take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you.*

*"What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself.*

*"Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life.*

*"Did you use to make ends meet by stealing? Well, no more! Get an honest job so that you can help others who can't work. Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.*

*"Don't grieve God. Don't break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don't take such a gift for granted. Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.*

What do you need to work on in your life? What practical steps can you take today to make this happen ...? Pray that God will help you make this change in your life ...

*Alone with none but You, my God,  
I journey on my way.  
What need I fear, when you are near,  
O King of night and day?  
Safer am I within Your hand,  
as you guide me day by day,  
than if a host did round me stand;  
Your Spirit leads me all the way.  
Amen*

Columba (521 - 597)

### **Sunday, June 3: Ephesians 5:1-21**

It's not brain surgery: "Be careful how you live," says, Paul. "Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do" (5:15-17). But it does take hard work. It does take a decision, will power, determination, and intentionality to make practical changes like these happen in your life.

I sometimes think that if I just *want* to change and *pray* about it – *poof!* – I should be a different person instantly. But then I go on and make the same mistake – again. I react the same way – again. Nothing is different – again. What's wrong? I wanted to change. I prayed.

Wanting to change is an essential starting point. Praying is right second step (both confessing my sin and praying for God to help me change).

***But real change will take some HARD work on my part, too.*** That's the third stage. I have to be ...

- **Intentional:** I need to be aware of what the problems in my life are, how I fall into temptation, what brings me down, and do what I need to do to avoid those things. I have to find ways to change. God will help me – but I need to be intentional about modifying my behaviors and attitudes, too.
- **Determined:** I **will** keep at it! God will help me become more and more "in step with the Spirit" – I have to not get discouraged and give up. Even when I stumble and fall, I need to ask forgiveness, and continue to carry on.
- **Uncompromising:** I can never be satisfied that I'm "good enough." I need to continue to reflect on what it means to "live wisely" – and become more and more like Jesus. What does it mean for my life to do what the Lord wants me to do?

Living wisely – living as God want me to – is a lifetime commitment to moment-by-moment conversation with, obedience to, and love for my Lord. It is not easy. Jesus never said it would be. But it is the richest possible way of living life to its fullest. Jesus, help me ...

*O Lord and Master of my life,  
Do not let me give in to a spirit of idleness,  
of discouragement,  
of lust for power,  
of greed,  
and of vain speaking.  
But bestow upon me, Your servant, the spirit of holiness,  
of meekness,  
of patience,  
of mercy,  
and of love.  
O Lord and King, grant that I may perceive my own transgressions,  
and judge not my brother.  
Blessed are You, O Lord, unto ages of ages.  
Amen.*

Ephraem the Syrian (306-373)

## Monday, June 4: Luke 18:1-8

Parables are powerful teaching tools. Reflect on what Jesus is saying in this parable in Luke 18. Here is a parable I received by email. It gives me pause for reflection, too:

*A young woman went to her mother and told her about her life and how things were so hard for her. She was tired of fighting and struggling. It seemed as one problem was solved, a new one arose. Her mother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water and placed each on high heat. When the pots came to boil, she placed carrots in the first pot, eggs in the second, and ground coffee beans in the last. In about twenty minutes she turned off the burners. She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. She pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Then she ladled the coffee out and placed it in a bowl. Turning to her daughter, she asked, 'Tell me what you see.'*

*'Carrots, eggs, and coffee,' she replied.*

*Her mother brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots; they were soft. The mother then asked the daughter to take an egg and break it; it was now hard boiled. Finally, the mother asked the daughter to sip the coffee; it tasted wonderful. The daughter then asked, 'What is the point?'*

*'Each of these objects had faced the same adversity,' her mother explained: 'boiling water. But each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting; but after being in the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg had been fragile; its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior, but after sitting through the boiling water, its inside became hard. The ground coffee beans, however, after they were in the boiling water, changed the water into something wonderful.'*

*'Which are you?' the mother asked her daughter.*

*Which am I?*

- *Am I the carrot that seems strong, but with pain and adversity do I wilt and lose my strength?*
- *Am I the egg that starts with a tender heart, but changes with the heat? Was I gentle and soft, but – after trials and struggles – have I become hard and inflexible? Does my shell look the same, but am I bitter and tough on the inside?*
- *Or am I like the coffee bean? The bean actually changes the hot water, the very circumstance that brings the pain. When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavor. If you are like the bean, when things are at their worst, you get better and change the situation around you.*

How do you handle adversity? Are you a carrot, an egg or a coffee bean?

To be the coffee beans, we need to stay close to Jesus, walk humbly with Him moment-by-moment – and pray. Jesus' parable reminds me that I need to pray, and keep on praying, through the good times and the hard times. Prayer changes everything.

*O Eternal God and King of all creation,  
who has granted me to arrive at this hour,  
forgive me the sins that I have committed today in thought, word and deed.  
Cleanse, O Lord, my humble soul from all defilement of flesh and spirit.  
Grant me, O Lord, to pass the sleep of this night in peace,  
that when I rise from my bed  
I may please Your most holy Name, all the days of my life,  
serving you with all my life and all my love.  
Deliver me, O Lord, from vain and frivolous thoughts,  
and from evil desires which defile me.  
For Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
now and ever, and to the ages of ages.  
Amen.*

Macarius the Great (300–391)

## Tuesday, June 5: Luke 18:9-14

What would you like to boast to God about? Let's be honest: there are times when we want to tell Him – and other people – either about how good we are or all the good we have done. We may look down on others' moral or spiritual lives; we have our lives so much more "together." We know the right way to do things; others are wrong. Our human natures struggle with humility.

With honesty, however, I need to look on what is good in myself and acknowledge that anything good is a gift – my talents, possessions, and what I have made of them. All I have, all I am. I also have to be honest that I may not be as good – or right – as I think I am; perhaps my sin is pride and self-righteousness. I may begin with the prayer of the Pharisee, but I need to end with the prayer of the taxman: *"Cover me O Lord with your mercy, for, with all my good deeds and intentions, there is a deeply sinful side of me which needs your mercy."*

A wise pundit has quipped: *"May you have enough happiness to make you sweet, enough trials to make you strong, enough sorrow to keep you human, and enough hope to make you happy."*

As those who believe in Jesus we might modify this: *"May you have enough joy to make you thankful, enough trials to keep you humble, enough sorrow to keep you depending on Jesus, and enough hope to keep you faithful to the end."*

*O God and Lord of the Powers, and Maker of all creation,  
who, because of your grace and incomparable mercy,  
sent Your Only-Begotten Son and our Lord Jesus Christ  
for the salvation of mankind,  
who, with His Cross, tore asunder the record of our sins,  
and conquered the rulers and powers of darkness;  
receive from us sinful people, O merciful Master,  
our prayers of gratitude and supplication.*

*Deliver us from every destructive and gloomy transgression and sin,  
and from all visible and invisible enemies who seek to injure us.  
Nail down our flesh with reverence for You,  
and do not let our hearts be inclined to words or thoughts of evil.  
Pierce our souls with Your love.  
May we always contemplate You,  
be enlightened by You,  
know You and see You,  
the unapproachable and everlasting Light.*

*We come, offering unceasingly confession and gratitude to You:  
The eternal Father, with Your Only-Begotten Son,  
and with Your All-Holy, Gracious, and Life-Giving Spirit,  
now and ever, and unto ages of ages.  
Amen.*

Basil of Caesarea (330-379)

## Wednesday, June 6: Luke 18:15-17

Frank Doyle writes, *"You remember the Gospel scene where Jesus encountered noisy children. A crowd of them interrupted his preaching, and the apostles were shooing them away. They were boisterous, energetic, enjoying life, running instinctively towards someone who also enjoyed it. The apostles spoke sternly to those who brought them. ('These kids are not serious. We are here to listen to serious teaching and we can't hear him properly with all this noise and commotion')."*

*"Jesus intervened, invited the children closer and laid his hands on them. He gave them two precious things that cost no money: time and affection. These days, parents often experience a famine of time, so that children suffer from too little attention. Concern about children's safety means that children suffer from not being touched. Yet children's needs remain the same."*

Doyle's insights are interesting and thought-provoking as we reflect on our children/grandchildren/nieces/nephews/kids at church. Who can you give some time and affection to?

As we think about the issue of justice – acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God – to whom can we give the simple gifts of time and affection beyond your immediate circle?

Children "receive the kingdom of God" simply by coming to Jesus, with love and trust. They enjoy His presence. They seek to bring Him joy not sorrow. Jesus asks us to "receive the kingdom of God like a little child." That sounds easy, but what does it mean for me to "receive the kingdom of God like a little child"?

I simply come to Jesus, with love and trust. I enjoy His presence. I try to live in such a way that I bring Him joy not sorrow (after all, His guidelines are for my good, not to make my life miserable!). That sounds so simple. Why is it so difficult to live out in practice? Lord help me to live more purely for you.

*O Lord, who has mercy upon all,  
take away from me my sins.  
In your mercy, please kindle in me the fire of Your Holy Spirit.  
Take away from me the heart of stone,  
and give me a heart of flesh:  
a heart to love and adore You,  
a heart to delight in You,  
a heart to follow and enjoy You,  
a heart to serve you and worship you,  
a heart to live every moment of every day for you.  
In Christ's Name, I pray.  
Amen.*

Ambrose (337-397)

#### **Thursday, June 7: Matthew 25:1-13**

As we think about "What does the Lord require of us?" one of the themes in the Jesus' teaching is that He wants us to be ready for His return. I need to be wise. I need to make good choices. I don't want to procrastinate. As an adult, I cannot blame parents or schooling or peers for decisions I make and where I am at. I have been given freedom and must answer for it. What does it mean to be ready? Answer: simply to be acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with Jesus.

Think about this story: why would someone take a lamp and not oil? It makes no sense (like going camping with firewood but no matches). Jesus offers you a full and meaningful life: why would you **not** accept the gift? It's baffling.

Jesus challenges me to make a choice – to love Him with all my heart, mind, soul and strength **and** love my neighbour as myself (to act justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with God). That choice makes all the difference for a fulfilling, content life. Five ladies made such a wise choice; that made the difference.

The other girls were too late because they put things off. Is there anything in my life that I keep postponing?

*Lord, be with us this day:  
Within us to purify us;  
Above us to draw us up;  
Beneath us to sustain us;  
Before us to lead us;  
Behind us to restrain us;  
Around us to protect us.  
In all our ways may we acknowledge you  
and follow you in peace. Amen*

Patrick (389-461)

## Friday, June 8: Matthew 25:14-30

Former NFL quarterback Jim McMahon said, "*Risk taking is inherently failure-prone. Otherwise, it would be called sure-thing-taking.*" Canadians are notoriously **not** risk takers. We are the most heavily insured nation in the world (which has probably been to our banks' advantage during recent economic upheavals). Overall, playing things safe is not a bad thing. To a point.

There come times when must make decisions or take actions that stretch us beyond our comfort zone, that lead us into the unknown. There are times when "*sure-thing-taking*" is not possible. We have to choose a school, a job, a spouse, a vocation, a direction, etc. We have to choose to believe in Jesus. We have to choose to trust Jesus. We have to choose to take a risk and step out in faith with Jesus ...

These decision points are opportunities for us to grow personally. To stretch ourselves mentally. To further develop emotionally. To cultivate faith spiritually. It's only when stretch and step out in faith that we mature. Spiritual growth happens with adventure and risk.

We do not all follow the same pattern or move in the same direction; we are responsible to use what gifts we have in the situation we are placed. That will stretch us. It will challenge us. But when we lean on God's strength, in faith, we grow. We mature. We cultivate faith we can exercise in more challenging circumstances.

I am responsible to use well what God has entrusted to me. The issue is not how much I have: my time, abilities, and money are not my own (I am a caretaker, not an owner). The real issue is how well I am using what I have. God is not vindictively out to get me if I am not perfect, but He does invite me to celebrate the gifts He has given us by using them for His glory. Be honest – God has given you unique abilities, talents, experiences, interests, and resources. How can you use them for His kingdom?

*As I rise from sleep I thank You, O Holy Trinity,  
Father, Son, and Spirit.  
Through Your great goodness and patience  
You have had mercy on me, an idler and sinner;  
nor have You destroyed me in my sins.  
You have shown great mercy and love to me and all people.  
When I am in despair,  
you raise me into a new morning,  
through your grace and power.  
Now enlighten my mind's eye and open my mouth  
to study Your words  
and understand Your commandments  
and do Your will  
and sing to You in heartfelt adoration and praise.  
All glory to You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
now and ever, and to the ages of ages.  
Amen.*

Basil the Great (329-379)

## Saturday, June 9: Matthew 25:31-46

What does the Lord require of us? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our Lord. Isn't that exactly what this parable is all about?

God has a special place in His heart for the poor and suffering. As a church we want to model that – which is why we invest heavily in mission through our budget (>10%), Thank Offering, and individual support of missions and ministry, AND by our practical work with the Soup Kitchen, food banks, lodges, homelessness, shelters, new Canadian programmes, literacy, and other organizations who work with those struggling. What can you do?

- Feed the poor and struggling
  - Contribute donations of food or money to our local food banks (a box is in the church foyer)

- Volunteer in the community (the last Wednesday of each month is our “soup kitchen” day)
  - Support a missionary or mission project (for ideas see our brochure, *Ministry Opportunities* [it’s also online [www.firstb.net](http://www.firstb.net): “Ministry & Mission”], [www.cbmin.org](http://www.cbmin.org), or talk with a pastor)
  - Do you have an idea to help the needy? Let us know!
- Work for justice for the poor:
    - Volunteer with us at the soup kitchen, seniors’ lodges, new Canadian programmes
    - Help other agencies that work with those in need
    - Beware of negative attitudes you may have toward certain groups of people – and change them.
    - Do you have a specific idea? Let us know!

Another encouraging theme in this parable is that God is pleased with all we do, even things we are unaware that we may be doing! What we think of as small things may be huge in the Kingdom of God. So ...

- Cultivate a loving lifestyle: God is generous in His love; be generous in your love. God is patient: be patient. God is “longsuffering” in His mercy and grace; be longsuffering in your relationships.
- God’s will is at least as much about how you live in the “ordinary times” as in the big decision times: the things you might dismiss as unimportant – helping in the nursery, cleaning up after a church meal, greeting a newcomer – may make all the difference to other people.
- Find “little moments” in your day to help people out. People learn more about Jesus through how we open the door for them, thank them when they serve us, shovel a neighbour’s walk, speak with a visitor, care for their children, bring a meal when they are in need, than all the words we say.

*You, Lord, through your works  
have revealed the everlasting structure of the world.  
You, Lord, created the earth.  
You are faithful throughout all generations,  
righteous in your judgments,  
marvelous in strength and majesty,  
wise in creating and prudent in establishing what exists,  
good in all that is observed and faithful to those who trust in you,  
merciful and compassionate;  
forgive us our sins and our injustices,  
our transgressions and our shortcomings.*

*Do not take into account every sin of us, your servants,  
but cleanse us with the cleansing of your truth.  
Direct our steps to walk in holiness and righteousness and purity of heart,  
and to do what is good and pleasing in your sight.  
Yes, Lord, let your face shine upon us in peace, for our good.  
May we be sheltered by your mighty hand,  
and delivered from every sin by your uplifted arm.  
Deliver us as well from those who hate us unjustly.*

*Give harmony and peace to us and to all who dwell on the earth,  
just as you did to our fathers  
when they reverently called upon you in faith and trust.  
May we obey your almighty and most excellent name,  
and heed your commands  
that all may be blessed and know you,  
in Word and in deed,  
for faith without good deeds is useless.  
And unless we tell the good news, how shall they hear?  
Amen*

Clement of Rome (died 99 AD)

## Sunday, June 10: Colossians 3:1-17

This month we have read Paul's before-you-were-Christian and after-you-are-Christian passages in Galatians 5 and Ephesians 4-5. Paul gives similar advice to the Christians in Colossae, too. Let's read it in *The Message* translation, to help us hear God's Word with fresh ears:

*"So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.*

*"Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. He is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.*

*"And that means killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That's a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God. It's because of this kind of thing that God is about to explode in anger. It wasn't long ago that you were doing all that stuff and not knowing any better. But you know better now, so make sure it's all gone for good: bad temper, irritability, meanness, profanity, dirty talk.*

*"Don't lie to one another. You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ.*

*"So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.*

*"Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way."*

What part of this passage do you find most challenging? Why?

What do you need to work on? What practical steps can you take – today – to make that change?

Pray that God would give you the strength you need to be the change God is challenging you to be ...

*I do not shape you, O God;  
it is, You, my God, who shapes me.  
I am the work of your hands  
and I will allow your Spirit  
to re-make me in His image.  
I offer you my heart, my life, my all,  
Hard, broken and twisted though I may be.  
I pray you sculpt me into the person you created me to be,  
beautiful, faithful, and free.  
May the imprint of your fingers on my life never fade,  
but always bring honour and glory to your Name.  
Amen*

based on Irenaeus (died 202 AD)