

Last week we discussed our call to “faithfully attend church.” Part one is presence and participation. Part two is tending to and caring for one another as members of God’s church. Doing so provides us with examples of what it means to be faithful children of God. Today, I want to dig deeper into the core of tending to and caring for one another and what exactly God requires of us. Another way to define serving others is to refer to the text **Micah 6:6-8**. “What does the Lord require? Do justice. Love mercy (kindness). Walk humbly with God.”

Many factions of people throughout society can be identified with... Rich and poor, urban and rural, welcomed and unwelcomed, disrupter and rule follower, aware and oblivious, employed and unemployed, silent and protester, churched and unchurched, believers and unbelievers, educated and uneducated, sober and junky, surviving and thriving, fed and hungry, violent and peaceful, connected and isolated, funny and serious, treated and neglected, anxious and carefree, oppressor and oppressed, prey and predator, unfaithful and faithful, dishonest and trustworthy, fighter and flighter, accepted and unaccepted, those with and those without, secure and on the edge... many factions of people throughout society can be identified with. Each is based on various circumstances, choices, outcomes, opportunities, or lack thereof. And not only do these factions exist, but it is also likely we each have assumptions about the factions we heard just now- Who they are? What they do or have done? One lifestyle compared to the other.

Is it right to have factions? Is it wrong? Is it fair? Is it just what it is? What is there to do about it? Is there anyone who can do anything about it? How do factions affect our society? How do factions affect our call to faithfully attend church? How do factions affect our willingness to do, love, walk, faithfully? How do you think God holds this image?

Just recently, The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church, specifically from the Episcopal Church Office of Public Affairs, wrote a reflection article on the events surrounding Tyre Nichols. You likely are familiar with at least the name Tyre Nichols and perhaps even some of the details of his death. My purpose for mentioning it this morning is not to dissect the case and what happened to Tyre. My mentioning it this morning is because of the conversation events like his death invite. The Most Rev. Curry mourns the event and what it reflects as to how we treat one another as human beings. As events like this unfold and seem to occur with regularity, the struggle Curry notes is how a group of men dedicated to protecting and serving could be involved in such an act?

Curry offers the following in the beginning: “A family grieves. A community fears. A nation is ashamed. Like the psalmist in the Bible, something in us cries out, “How long, O Lord, how long?” How long violence, how long cruelty, how long the utter disregard for the dignity and worth of every child of God? How long?”

What Curry does next is admirable in my book, because he builds upon the cry to God of “How long?” Curry continues to remind us that there is work to be done and we, as God’s children, have a stake in this work.

As a guiding light toward hope for folks, Curry references “the story Jesus once told to teach about what it looks like to love one’s neighbor, which Moses and Jesus both said is a commandment, not just from God, but of God. The story is the story of the good Samaritan, in which a man is beaten nearly to death and left on the side of the road to die by people who knew what Moses taught about love for God and neighbor. And if they knew what Moses taught, they would have also known what the prophet Micah taught when he said that God requires three things of us: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. Only one person that day stopped to help the man, and he did so because the man on the road was human. He helped because he was a fellow child of God. He helped because the man lying on the side of the road, regardless of faction was his brother.”

What Curry writes next is what struck me the most, “The fundamental call and vocation of... every one of us, is that of the Good Samaritan. There is hope: The Good Samaritan in the parable of Jesus was not the last one. While we grieve, we cannot give in or give up. Just throwing up our hands in despair is not an option lest we leave a brother, a sister, a sibling on the side of the road again. No, let more Good Samaritans arise.”

What does it look like and mean for us to be faithful children of God? God’s command for us is to love our neighbor as ourselves and I will add here since we have a class studying it right now that Jesus also issues us the command to love our enemies. What God requires of us is to do, love, walk, faithfully. Faithful children of God not only hear and know of God’s commandments but also own and embody God’s commandments. Faithfulness includes fulfillment, not simply knowledge or understanding. James would even push to say, without faithful fulfillment, there was no true knowledge or understanding.

Are God’s commandments difficult to swallow? Daunting? Do they make us anxious and fearful? Maybe as much as some of us wanting to get our hands dirty; digging in the dirt or mixing food together in a bowl? Icky, and sticky, and clumpy, and sometimes startling? Do

they defy our own sense of logic and reason? I don't know, maybe we think God is nuts for believing in us this much? We are human, doesn't God know we are only human?

Yes, factions can be difficult to wrap our heads around. The questions assumed around factions are not accompanied by easy answers. Factions are complex and complicated. Death, especially tragic death inflicted by others, is complex and complicated. However, God's commandments and call to us as faithful children of God are clear: Do justice. Love Mercy (kindness). Walk humbly with God. Do. Love. Walk. We can remember that, can't we? We can also do that, can't we? God believes in us, or God wouldn't have said it and Jesus wouldn't have done it himself as an example for us to follow.

How can we fulfill God's commandment faithfully? To answer this, we need to consider who wrote the manual on justice and mercy? The true manual on justice and mercy was not written, it was embodied by Jesus, and to the best of my knowledge, even though many others have been considered saints throughout their lifetime, Jesus is the only one to have ever fully embodied it faithfully. So, if we want to know what it looks like then to do justice, love mercy (kindness), and walk humbly with God, we must do everything we can to follow Christ and be as Christ-like as we can.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for us is to get over ourselves. Here is what I mean. We have a tendency toward self-preservation and self-protection. I know I do. When I am presented with an opportunity to serve others, I have a tendency to ask first what impact it will have on me and my family. Will it cost me money? Can I afford to do that? What do I think my wife will say? If I take the time to do that I can't take the time with my kids I thought I had today? And in the end, my tendency toward self-preservation and self-protection may indeed keep me from doing, loving, and walking, in being the good Samaritan, as God commands. And I feel totally justified in my thinking. Anyone else feel this way? This wall I build then denies what it may indeed cost the other for me to remain comfortable and on schedule.

Before going too much further, I think it may be important for me to be clear on a few things in case we might think that because God commands us to do these things, that every circumstance and every person is our new mission field. That is not what I am suggesting. Doing justice and loving mercy and walking humbly with God is not doing something for someone when they are able to do for themselves. That may indeed be an injustice to them. Reference "When Helping Hurts" or "Toxic Charity". It is not enabling someone to avoid their circumstance and ride on the generosity of another giving handouts. Doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God faithfully *is* empowering. Doing, loving, walking, faithfully *is* building up. Doing, loving, walking, faithfully *is* offering a hand up. Doing, loving, walking,

faithfully *is* helping pour dignity into another who has either never had it because of this or that or maybe lost it because of this or that.

As I think of this I am reminded of *A Knight's Tale*, a movie with Heath Ledger about a peasant boy- squire of a knight, who seeks to change his stars by becoming a knight himself.

I am reminded of *The Greatest Showman*, a movie with Hugh Jackman, Michelle Williams, and Zac Efron, telling the story of the becoming of the Barnum and Bailey Circus. P.T. Barnum's story is a story of a boy who had dignity beat out of him by society and circumstance, but his hope and dreams of a new world propelled him, and the cast of characters he invited on his journey, to new possibilities and status. And in the middle of the movie is the song *Rewrite the Stars* portraying a hope and longing of two people from two different backgrounds, two sets of rules, two sets of expectations, to rewrite the script society was telling them to live and follow their hearts.

Doing justice, loving mercy (kindness), and walking humbly with God faithfully actively works to change and rewrite the stars for every person being poured into, including the one or ones doing the pouring. Is it right for some people to be where they started? Is it fair? Did they do something to deserve it? These might be our questions, but they aren't God's. God doesn't define us using the same qualifications we do for one another. I don't think God looks at us this way. To God, we are all awesome. We do some awful things sometimes, and God doesn't like that, but those things aren't beyond God's grace and God's mercy. God knows the potential in us, all of us (in here and out there) and God still wants us, all of us (in here and out there) to become all God intended.

Does doing, loving, and walking faithfully today seem like too big a mountain to climb? God thinks we can. As a matter of fact, God knows we can, because God put the power and work of the Holy Spirit inside us to help make it happen.

I can't help but think of Matthew West's song *Do Something*, which says:

I woke up this morning Saw a world full of trouble now... Thought, how'd we ever get so far down? How's it ever gonna turn around? So I turned my eyes to heaven I thought, "God, why don't You do something?" Well, I just couldn't bear the thought of People living in poverty Children sold into slavery... The thought disgusted me So, I shot my fist at heaven and said, "God, why don't You do something?" God said, "I did, I created you!"