

From the Bishop

The Right Reverend Robert L. Fitzpatrick
The Episcopal Diocese of Hawai'i



October 29, 2020

A Message from the Bishop Before Election Day 2020

Aloha my dear Siblings in Christ Jesus,

This has been a contentious election season. Many of us are suffering from campaign fatigue and a weariness from hearing angry words. As we prepare for the ballot count results on election day (and perhaps the days that follow), I have been pondering a verse of Scripture. It is from the Prophet Micah: “He has told you, human one, what is good and what the Lord requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God” [Micah 6:8 (Common English Bible)]. These words are also often translated as “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

The Prophet Micah lived during a time of anxiety and conflict. In 722 BCE, the Assyrian empire destroyed the northern Kingdom of Israel. Micah was a Prophet in the southern Kingdom of Judah. Early chapters of this book describe the chaos and mourning caused by the destruction of most of the cities and towns of the Judean countryside and the siege of Jerusalem. The oracles of the Prophet highlight the conflict of his time and place, the political reality of living in a tiny kingdom caught between three competing empires (Assyria, Egypt and Babylon), and the internal frustration and oppression of ordinary people by the wealthy in the kingdom of Judah. The message of the Prophet Micah becomes one of warning for leaders and ordinary people that disaster is upon them, but because of God's kindness and faithful love, hope and renewal will ultimately triumph. The message of the Book looks beyond the destruction of Judah by the Babylonians to a time of peace and justice (Micah 4:3): “God will judge between the nations and settle disputes of mighty nations, which are far away. They will beat their swords into iron plows and their spears into pruning tools. Nation will not take up sword against nation; they will no longer learn how to make war.”

The three requirements for faithful living according to the Prophet are “to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.” You’ll remember that this type of instruction is very much like those in Psalm 15 when the pilgrim asks: “Who can live in your tent, Lord? Who can dwell on your holy mountain?” The reply is: “The person who lives free of blame, does what is right, and speaks the truth sincerely; who does no damage with their talk, does no harm to a friend, doesn’t insult a neighbor; someone who despises those who act wickedly, but who honors those who honor the Lord; someone who keeps their promise even when it hurts; someone who doesn’t lend money with interest, who won’t accept a bribe against any innocent person.” These are the “requirements” to walk with God.

When reflecting on the Kingdom of Judah, Micah is concerned because:

- The powerful oppress the powerless (2:1–2, 8–9; 3:1–3, 3:9–10);
- People are exploited (3:10); and
- Courts are corrupt (3:11).

To “do justice” means there must be equity for all and especially for the powerless. One “does” justice. It is an action of the faithful.

With it, one must “embrace faithful love.” I think that is a better translation for the Hebrew word *hesed* than “kindness.” In the Hebrew Scripture, it is a word used to describe the relationship of a married couple (Hosea 2:19), the relationship between two friends (I Samuel 20:14), and, most importantly, of the relationship of the faithful to God (Hosea 6:4 and 6:6). Our love of God – and God’s love for us – changes the way we relate to the world.

All, however, is brought together in the call to “walk humbly with your God.” This is a way of being with God and with others. The call to humility here is the warning to be circumspect and prudent about yourself and your place in the world. Paul offers an insight into such humility in Romans 12:3: “Because of the grace that God gave me, I can say to each one of you: don’t think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Instead, be reasonable since God has measured out a portion of faith to each one of you.”

During times such as ours, the individual follower of God in Christ Jesus is also a voting citizen. We must not, therefore, fall into the habit of hate or the use of the language of vindictiveness. We must approach this election with recognition that all political leaders and all political groups are finite and limited. No human leader is the anointed of God. To see an individual leader or a political movement as “salvation” or any form of the “absolute truth” is idolatry and a sin. For the Christian voter, that is a comfort because we know the relative nature of life before the love of God. Before God, there is no such thing as a “Christian nation” or a “Christian leader.” Policies and leaders may lead to Christian ideals and hopes as we imagine them, but we must not confuse faith with the limited reality of governance and policy enactment.

As we approach Election Day, I suggest that you keep these four principles in mind (along with Micah’s call to “to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.”)

1. The love of God for humanity: In the words of the “Catechism” (BCP page 846), “...the universe is good, that it is the work of a single loving God who creates, sustains, and directs it.” God’s love is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. “God is love” (“Catechism,” BCP page 849).
2. The sinfulness of humanity: Human beings by our limited and finite nature can and do make hurtful choices. Again, from the “Catechism” (BCP page 848): “Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all of creation.”
3. The freedom of humanity: “[W]e are free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God... From the beginning, human beings have misused their freedom and made wrong choices” (“Catechism,” BCP page 845).
4. For Christians, the moral imperative is summarized in the Great Commandment (Mark 12:28-31): “One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, ‘Which commandment is the most important of all?’ Jesus replied, ‘The most important one is *Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, and you*

must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.”

Whatever happens as the election results are revealed and we await the outcome in the days and weeks ahead, you and I rest in the love of God in Jesus Christ. We must reject words that vilify others (especially with those with whom we disagree), and we must reject all forms of violence and hate. We can show the love of Christ Jesus remembering that life is transitory, and that all elected officials are limited and sinful human beings just like ourselves. Most importantly, we must each do our utmost “to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.”

Lastly, we can pray:

Almighty God, to whom we must account for all our powers and privileges:
Guide the people of the United States and of the State of Hawai‘i in the election of officials and representatives; that, by faithful and prudent administration, and by the enactment and equitable enforcement of wise and just laws, the rights of all may be protected and our nation be enabled to fulfill your purposes; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Remember, my dear Siblings in Christ Jesus, that God loves you.

As your Bishop, I love you.

Please know that you are in my prayers.

Please pray for me.

Aloha.