

February 1, 2026 - Trinity Episcopal Church - 4th Sunday after the Epiphany

Rev. Elizabeth Molitors

***God has told you, O mortal, what is good
Micah 6:8a***

A few weeks ago, as I was paging through my hymnal, trying to get to the page of the next hymn we were to sing, I found this [\[https://www.ilrc.org/redcards\]](https://www.ilrc.org/redcards) tucked inside. This is one of the informational cards that we began making available around this time last year, to remind people what their rights are if they got stopped and asked about their immigration status. The card offers language for the cardholder to use, about not wishing to answer questions or hand over documents, which are guarantees of the Constitution's 5th amendment. The cardholder is reminded that they can refuse to give permission for someone to enter their home or search their belongings, unless shown a judicial warrant signed by a judge, a protection of the 4th amendment. And at the very bottom is a note that these protections apply to citizens and noncitizens alike.

I remember when parishioner Molly Kellogg, who has done so much work locally with immigrant organizations, I remember when she talked to us about these cards, and how we might use them and invited us to share them with people who most needed to know this information, those most likely to be challenged by immigration enforcement officials. I remember feeling disturbed by the notion that knowing and disseminating such detailed information was necessary, because it meant that there were circumstances where peoples' constitutional rights were being or about to be violated, and so they had to be armed with constitutional knowledge, to

be able to say, “No, I don’t have to do that. I don’t have to open my car door or my home or do whatever it is you’re asking me to do, because the constitution is there to protect me.” I remember feeling heartsick about these circumstances, but at the same time, I also felt like this little card was so empowering. That the knowledge it offered was power, and this knowledge could be used to stand up to injustice.

That was then, and it seems like so long ago. A kind of quaint artifact from a distant time, or another culture.

The day I discovered this card tucked in my hymnal was the Sunday after Renee Good was shot multiple times at close range by federal immigration officials in Minneapolis. I don’t know if Renee Good knew about the constitutional rights that undergird these cards, or that allow for people to speak out in protest or to assemble and demonstrate. I don’t know what she knew, but I DO know that these words didn’t protect her or keep her safe that day. And they’ve failed so many others, as well — others who’ve been disappeared, injured, and killed.

Words alone mean next to nothing when they’re not paired with actions that back them up, that make them real.

I was reminded of a song from the musical, *My Fair Lady*, when Eliza Doolittle sings to the man who has been courting her with all sorts of beautiful words, but little else. In part, Eliza complains to her suitor, saying:

Words! Words! Words!

I'm so sick of words!

*If you're in love,
Show me!*

*Sing me no song!
Read me no rhyme!
Don't waste my time,
Show me!*

“Show me” might be an apt summary of the portion of scripture we read this morning from the book of Micah.

In our lectionary cycle of readings, we don't hear very much of the prophet Micah's words, so you may not be familiar with the story that he's telling. Like most prophets, Micah's job is to hold up a mirror to the people to whom he's been sent to share his message. Micah is speaking to the people of Israel, calling them out about the systemic injustices that he sees: exploitation of the land, abuse of power by elites, leaders getting rich at the expense of ordinary people, corrupt leadership.

(There is nothing new under the sun, friends.)

Micah predicts the eventual downfall and destruction of Jerusalem, not as a punishment from God, but as an inevitable consequence of a society that has veered away from being the people and community God created them to be.

The people are headed for trouble, but if they think that they can buy God's favor and avoid the collapse of their cultural system by making elaborate ritual sacrifices to God, they are misguided, Micah tells them. God cares how God's people are living, and there's only one way to put things right, which is laid out in what's among the most famous passages in the Hebrew scriptures: what does the Lord require of you, Micah asks? To do justice. To do loving-kindness. To walk humbly with God.

Actions, not just rituals, not just words. *Don't waste my time, show me!*

To *do justice* means ensuring what is fair for the most vulnerable, setting things right structurally so that justice continues to happen.

To *do loving-kindness*—the word in Hebrew is *hesed*—which means love as an action, commitment expressed through care.

And, to *walk humbly with God*—walking, as in how we make our way through life; our ongoing conduct, our habits, decisions, and priorities. Making our way with God as our companion and partner, who reminds us that we are part of an interconnected whole, something larger than our own desires, ambitions, and self-interests. Yes, I matter—but so do you, and so does everyone else.

The protests that are taking place in communities all across our country demonstrate our current-day frustrations with the inconsistency between the words written on these cards and a lack of actions backing up

the first and fourth and fifth and fourteenth constitutional amendments, wanting to make sure that there's some substance behind those words, and that they apply to everyone. Instead, there is unchecked, lawless brutality being loosed, especially on people of color, along with many who are speaking out or demonstrating against such brutality. If Micah were here, he might point out that we are suffering from the same systemic maladies that he identified nearly 3,000 years ago. The same inequities, the same corruption, the same exploitation of the vulnerable earth and earth's most vulnerable people.

Which suggests that the remedy Micah lays out might have some relevance for us, as well. That doing justice and practicing hesed and striving to walk through the world with humility might help us in dismantling the destructive systems, and rebuilding healthier, more just ones. Which, as with so much of what God asks of us, can be easier said than done.

But I also want to suggest that we're facing now some special circumstances that weren't present in Micah's time. I'm thinking about the deep polarization and growing sense of disconnection in our culture, fueled not just by differences of opinion and politics, but by mechanisms built into social media platforms and other online tools we interact with.

I recently listened to a fascinating and wide-ranging interview conducted by Ezra Klein, with his guest, James Talarico, who is currently serving in the Texas state legislature, and is a candidate for the U.S. Senate. As a side note, he's also a Presbyterian seminarian, on his way to becoming

a minister, and so they explored intersections of politics and faith. If you haven't heard the interview, I'd commend it to you.

One of the topics they got into was what they called the rise of the Rage Economy. They spoke about social media giants and others who profit off of our disconnection and distrust of one another. These companies have developed algorithms that don't care who we are, but are deliberately designed to make us click and rage, and then click some more. Our attention is how they make money, and, sadly, rage grabs our attention more quickly and for longer than anything else.

James Talarico pointed out, though, that the biggest competitor to these media platforms isn't another platform, like tik-tok—it's actual connection and relationships, in churches and pubs and book groups. What we do here, on Sunday mornings and in groups and events throughout the week...coming together, sharing stories, sharing meals, extending friendship, offering service....these connections we're making not only stand counter to the destructive rage economy, but they're the very substance of loving-kindness, and humility, leading us to a more just future.

I want to close today with a portion of the statement written in response to recent violent events in Minnesota, signed by more than 150 Episcopal bishops, which was released yesterday, and which was posted, among other places, on [foxnews.com](https://www.foxnews.com). Retired bishop, Diane Jardine Bruce (who used to serve here in the diocese of Los Angeles as the assistant bishop), she described the purpose of the letter and where it was being

posted this way. She wrote, “*Our message as bishops is simple: we’re calling for peaceful, lawful ways to stand up for what’s right. Real safety comes from mutual respect, courage, and moral accountability. By sharing this message, where many independent and centrist readers turn for news, we’re inviting reflection, rather than argument.*”

And here is a portion of the bishops’ letter; they write,

Every act of courage matters. We must keep showing up for one another. We are bound together because we are all made in the image of God. This begins with small, faithful steps.

As bishops in the Episcopal Church, we promise to keep showing up—to pray, to speak, and to stand with every person working to make our communities just, safe, and whole.

We are committed to making our communities safer and more compassionate:

- *So children can walk to school without fear.*
- *So families can shop, work, and worship freely.*
- *So we recognize the dignity of every neighbor...*

You may feel powerless, angry, or heartbroken right now. Know that you’re not alone.

Each of us has real power: community power, financial power, political power, and knowledge power. We can show up for our neighbors,

support small businesses and food banks, contact elected officials and vote, and learn our rights so we can speak up peacefully without fear.

This crisis is about more than one city or state—it's about who we are as a nation. The question before us is simple and urgent: Whose dignity matters?

Our faith gives a clear answer: everyone's.

Safety built on fear is an illusion. True safety comes when we replace fear with compassion, violence with justice, and unchecked power with accountability. That's the vision our faith calls us to live out—and the promise our country is meant to uphold.

In the face of fear, we choose hope.

By the grace of God, may this season of grief become a season of renewal. May courage rise from lament, and love take root in every heart.”

So ends the letter.

Our current times are fraught and grim, and still we need to choose hope. Because in the midst of injustice, there *are* people working for structural justice; there *are* people committing acts of loving-kindness, all around us; there *are* people striving to “walk the talk” with humility, with God at their side. Borrowing from the words of writer and activist, Adrienne

Maree Brown, *The world isn't ending. A world is ending. Our job is to midwife the next one.*

May we have the will to make it a world that's safe, that's just, and more loving for everyone. *Amen.*