

Sunday, November 23, 2014

Covenant Sunday: Walking Humbly with God

Micah 6:8; Ephesians 4: 1-6; Philippians 2: 1-13; Matthew 11:29-30

Often discussions on religion revolve around helping us to live good lives, with an underlying sense of distinguishing between behavior that is considered to be either good or bad.

And, then, those whose behavior is considered to be “bad” somehow need “saving.”

But, that is to miss the point – it’s not about good and bad.

A cursory reading of the Bible reveals that it can’t just be about good and bad.

For the Bible is filled with all kinds of bad characters through whom God worked.

Some of the most exemplary characters such as Moses, David, Paul were all murderers.

They would probably be the first ones to declare that there is nothing good in them – which indeed Paul on a number of occasions did.

Yet, in spite of their behavior  
– there is something good to be emulated in them.

Paul expresses in 1 Cor. 4:16 and 11:1  
– “be imitators of me as I imitate Christ.”

What makes people good, what makes us good, is not something intrinsic within ourselves (as if that is what religion is really all about  
– discussions on morality about good and bad)

But religion is not primarily about our behavior, nor in a real sense, even about us.

It is about God.

It is about God’s relationship with us, and our relationship with God  
– and how this relationship transforms us, and the world in which we live, as we live out our lives.

To be good, has more to do with God and our being in covenant with God, than it does with our behaviors.

Yet, because we are in covenant with God  
– we can’t help but be transformed.

If we were to boil down what actions live out the embodiment of “goodness,” we would likely say “Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

And that may be the bar we set for goodness (and perhaps even rightly so), but that can leave things open to interpretation  
– as it was for the rich young man who asked, “who is my neighbor?”

### **In Micah 6:8 we discover a conversation about what is good.**

Micah expresses, “God has shown all you people what is good.”

God is saying, “in being the people of God, in being immersed in the Story of God, we already have a sense of what it means to be good”  
– as Micah gives voice to God’s voice  
– “I have shown you what is good.”

And by implication

– God continues saying, “goodness does not have to do with religious rites, sacrifices, offerings and such  
– often the signs or actions of being “religious.

Instead, “being and doing good exhibits itself in other ways.”

### **First and even foremost, being good, doing what is good, has to do with God**

When Jesus was addressed as good in Mark 10, Jesus responded to the rich young man, “why do you call me good. No one is good, except God alone.”

So, then, if God is good, and we ought to know what it is to be good (living as God’s set apart people)  
– because God has revealed it to us, what then does God require of us?  
– in order for us to embody this goodness that is God in the world?

We hear that what God requires of us is “to act justly, and to love mercy”  
– and over the past two weeks we have given attention to “mercy.”

Yet, the last thing

– and perhaps of first importance  
– of what God requires of us is: “to walk humbly with God.”

### **What does it mean to walk humbly with God?**

In the simplest sense, it has to do with acting, living, doing all that we are, being all that we are **mindful of God**,  
- in integral connection, interdependence upon God.

As one commentator expresses: “‘Can two walk together unless they be agreed?’ (cf. Amos 3:3) For walking with God there must be communion, based in love, and resulting in imitation. And that communion must be constant, and run through all the life, like a golden thread through some web. So, then, here is the minimum of the divine requirements, to give everybody what he has a right to, including the mercy to which he has a right, to have a lowly estimate of myself, and to live continually grasping the hand of God, and conscious of His overshadowing [presence] at all moments, and of conformity to His will at every step of the road.”

<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/micah/6-8.htm>

Simply, it has to do with literally walking with God

- in an attitude of receiving
- all that God requires from God.

I believe, we have made “goodness” too much of our own work, with it being our acts of doing the right thing before God, saying the right things, acting in a particularly repentant way

- the problem is that we keep trying to do the “good” not with much more than just a “shoutout” to God.

It’s often said, that we are known by the kind of friends we keep, the kind of people we hang out with.

And if we spend enough time with a particular group of people, they rub off on us, and hopefully, a little of us rubs off on them

- but overall, we take on the identity of the group with whom we are with.

### **I believe it’s the same way with God.**

When we hang out with God

- not just some of the time
- but when we hang out with God as much as we can
- living mindful of God being with us in all that we are and do
- and seeking to intentionally walk with God by integrating practices into our lives, which keep us focused upon God
- then we can’t help but be shaped by our relationship with God.

The Christian life, is a life of walking with Jesus, of walking with God

- not just visiting with God on Sundays, but walking with God 24/7
  - in the well-lit places of our lives,
  - and in the dark places of our lives.

Our intentionality involves yielding ourselves to God

- opening every part of our lives for God to do in us what God desires to do.

That’s what Paul was driving at in Philippians 2:12,13

- “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”

I think Paul had in mind something Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30:

“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you (walk with me) and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

**So, what is required of us?**

**To walk humbly with God!**

That is why we covenant ourselves to God, covenant ourselves to being Christ-centered, and covenant ourselves to one another

- because we are making a commitment to walk together with God, with Christ, and with one another
- being thankful to God for God in our lives, thankful for one another

In covenanting today,

We are committing ourselves today,

- to walk together with the people who seek to walk humbly with God,
- to walk together with a people who have discovered that to walk with God is to be centered in Christ Jesus,
- and to walk together with a people who realize that it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can walk humbly with God.

We covenant ourselves to one another, to Christ, and to God

- in order to be able to encourage one another to do and be good, to be godly in this world, to participate with God in making all things new
- to see the birthing of shalom in our world.

We covenant ourselves to one another, to Christ, and to God , so that we live with thankful hearts and lives.

So then, this morning (and in succeeding Sundays) you are invited to commit to this covenant today

- to renew this covenant with God and with one another **in your life!**

**And something else as well.**

Anne and I, as your pastoral team, invite you to another act of covenant.

A practice that engages us in “walking humbly with God.”

To commit yourselves to forming triads with one another.

For the purpose of encouraging each other to walk humbly with God in our daily lives.

These triads are focused on reading through the Gospel of Mark over 17 weeks

There are some courageous conversations we want to have together as a congregation.

MC USA is calling us to engage in a courageous conversation about how we as a denomination are to respond to the LGBTQ community.

In what ways are we to be welcoming?

Are we to be affirming?

What does it mean to live under the authority of Scripture?

We cannot engage these questions by approaching the Bible as an answer book  
– just going to it with our questions.

We need to be immersed in the cadences and rhythms of God’s Story and Vision for us to adequately engage in such courageous conversations.

Unless Scripture becomes an active partner in our lives  
– such questions will likely always divide us.

So what does the Gospel of Mark have to do with this courageous question?

**Nothing and everything?**

We are not engaging the Gospel of Mark to find specific answers to any particular question.

We are engaging the Gospel of Mark to develop the habit of being informed by Scripture in all that we do and are.

And so, in these triads, we invite you to gather together with two others to read and discover together how the Gospel intersects your life.

Explore where it challenges you.

And then pray together with one another

– i.e., practicing walking humbly with one another

– so that we may encourage one another in our walking humbly with God.

A sign up sheet is in the back.

A 17-week guide for reading through Mark’s Gospel is available there as well.

Once, you have signed up, Anne and I will invite you to form into groups, which will begin meeting in the new year.

So, let us renew or make covenant this morning.

Covenanting ourselves to this community with thankful hearts,

- which seeks to be Christ-centered,
- embodying Christ-like compassion, and,
- living with Christ-led courage.

Covenanting ourselves to walk with God

– by affiliating with this community

– as the community with whom you seek to “work out your salvation and for God to work in you.”

Committing yourself to prayer and ministry

Committing yourself to support our mutual ministry through giving of yourself and your finances.

I invite you to come up and make your commitments by placing your documents in the different baskets,

- while we sing and pray.

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