

## **Worth Hearing Again**

Matthew 5:1-12

Micah 6:1-8

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There are times when the Lectionary delivers a pleasant surprise. This Sunday is one of those times. As I read the selections, while a part of me felt like I was cheating, another part said, a banquet has been offered, who am I to turn it down. So we have, in one reading, one of the most profound passages in scripture and in the other, the words that have become a mantra to our congregation since our bicentennial. This Sunday is both a gift and a challenge. With passages that are so well known, so dear to us, there is a tendency to let the words flow over us, rather than flow into our consciousness and our souls. So, we have work to do.

I begin with an example from my life that grounds the meaning of the words of Micah into my heart. Did you ever lose your car in a parking lot or a garage. I have, several times. If you have, you may take pity on me as I tell my story.

Some here have heard the story of Adri and Vickie's great adventure in Key West. Bear with me as I repeat and expand on the story. Vickie Harlow and I wanted to visit Key West and set off on our first day in Marathon. We went because I inadvertently got on the 7 mile bridge that leads across the ocean, touching the various islands of the keys, and since we had no plans, nor much choice, we kept going. When we arrived, we decided to take a tourist trolley to give us a better idea of the places we wanted to see. We found a diagonal parking spot; rare in Key West. We paid at the kiosk and went on our excursion and had a great time. Later in the afternoon, we decided to call it a day. We started walking to where we thought the car was and it wasn't. We walked for almost an hour looking for diagonal parking spots with no luck.

When one is exhausted and frustrated, what does one do? Call the police of course. I called the office, told the person on the other line that we lost our car. She said that a patrol car would be by shortly. A while later, a cruiser pulled up and the nice officer invited us into the back seat and took us on a private tour of every parking area in the city. He was enjoying this experience, calling us a couple of deranged grannies until Vickie told him that I am a minister and if he wasn't careful, I'd put him in a sermon. Frank, our new best friend, called the parking enforcement people to see if a parking ticket had been issued. 'No.' He called the Car Rental company, to see if they had GPS links. 'No.' And, he tried mightily to jog our minds about where we might have parked. Our answer was 'diagonal and not near the water.' He constantly muttered, "She's a minister. I have to be nice or I'm going to hell." Finally with 10 minutes left on his shift, he said, "Ladies, there is one more place I want to try. I think that we'll find the car." We went down a street straight to the beach and there it was, diagonally parked right beside the water." How did we miss the Atlantic Ocean as we parked the car beside it?

The silliness of the situation in which we found ourselves may not seem to be a living out of Micah's words, but as I think back on that experience, I hear the question, "What does the Lord require of you? In our frustration and nervousness, we put our hands in the hands of God. Along came Frank who may not have been aware that he was answering Micah's question. He could have pulled out a map, circled all the parking areas in the town and wished us well. We would have been grateful even for that. And, yes, he is

a sworn officer of the peace. He could have said something about being called to another situation and it would have been true because he did receive a call while we were in the car. Instead, Frank took pity on two lost grandmothers, told us to get in the backseat and he would help us find our car. And he made the offer with joy. This was not a burden to him; it was an act of life-giving hilarity. And we relaxed. Was this justice? Not in the legal sense, it wasn't, but it was an act of God's justice that commands humanity to treat the poor, the strangers, the homeless and the weakest with care and loving consideration. This is not always a practice of those in positions of power; whatever the source of that power. We have all experienced those with inflated egos who make us wait just because they can, or delay setting up appointments for no reason other than the sense of power. Sometimes people in authority assume that their title is a divine mandate. It is sad that such people often live with great hurt or rawness from the pain that may have been inflicted on them. They may live in isolation; unable to maintain relationships, distrusting of others and drying up inside. They have not found love or kindness in their lives and are incapable of acting with kindness, let alone justice to others.

Frank probably had no idea that his kindness to us was in keeping with God's mandate. It bubbled up with the laughter at our predicament and the ongoing humor as he led us on that unique tour of Key West. His on-going dialogue about the wacky people who come for sunset, the parties that are held whenever a hurricane hits and his favorite sandwich, a Lobster Ruben were all better than any of the tour guides we listened to on our trolley ride.

Frank's uniform and badge gave him the power to do justice on behalf of the state; yet, his kindness to us reflected the third of Micah's requirements: 'To walk humbly with your God.' It is hard to take yourself seriously when you are squeezed into the back of a police cruiser looking for a car that you misplaced on an island noted for its quirkiness. Under those circumstances, it is not difficult to walk humbly with your God. As soon as we realized that we did not know where the car was, we realized that we were no longer in charge. For an hour we walked in circles trying to reclaim our sense of being in charge and becoming ever more exasperated with ourselves and the stupidity that brought us to this point in time. We second guessed ourselves into boredom. "Why didn't we note the street?" "Why didn't we take a good look at the area?" "Why didn't we take a picture of the cross streets?" Finally, totally embarrassed, we accepted our mistake and called for help.

For many of us, that call for help is a difficult or even impossible act. Embarrassed by circumstances; afraid to be seen as incapable; unwilling to trust another or too proud to make the call, so many of us struggle to find a way out of the dilemma in which we are caught. We are human beings with all the strengths and weaknesses that are a part of our humanness. When we forget that we are imperfect and attempt to place ourselves on pedestals, we trip over our feet of clay.

To walk humbly with our God is to live in reality. Micah's words portray a relationship of mutuality. We walk with God; not behind God. We are not inferior creatures. We are God's beloved children. As we walk together, God teaches us, inspires us and encourages us. In the recognition that we are loved, we are given the freedom to make mistakes, to fall, to reach wrong conclusions and to rise again, to learn from mistakes and to begin to see ever more clearly. When we accept our humble place at God's side, we learn the need for active loving kindness toward ourselves. We need to be kind to ourselves, but not exclusively. Kindness to all our sisters and brothers in the human community means

working for God's justice in great and in small ways, including prayer. To walk humbly with God means to be fully alive to all that life presents and to accept all the challenges as well as all the joys. It means that one day you might be standing on a street corner in Key West weary and discouraged, and a divine nudge suggests that you call for help. "And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." Thank you, Frank. Amen.