

February 1, 2026 - More than a Life in Service Inspired by Micah 6:6-8 and Matthew 5:1-12

The Prophet Micah's words can be easily distilled into the last three lines. Most of us know them by heart. "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." Those simple words of truth are among my most favourite biblical verses, because there is absolutely no doubt regarding their meaning. As God's own, Jesus' disciples, ministers all of us in this incredible COF, and elsewhere, that is our mantra, our "Raison d'être," our reason for being.

I think somewhere in every UC vision or mission statement that theme should be reflected. It is in ours, ***"Our mission is a call to inclusive, loving and compassionate discipleship. Our actions express our longing to make a difference in the world."*** We do justice through our outreach work in this community and others, (free clothing when needed, donations to other organizations, support of the Food Bank etc.), through contributions to the Mission & Service fund, welcoming the stranger.

Loving kindness is reflected in our generosity to each other and those in need. It is reflected in our persona, how we hold ourselves in this community, and how we move through the world being sensitive to the needs of others. It is reflected in our communion here and our communal living outside of these sanctuary walls.

And we are unassuming servants. We don't go about our spirit led lives hoping to get some payback. We don't have expectations of grandiose recognition for our efforts. We walk humbly with God and are content as disciples of Jesus.

Be just, be kind, be humble says Micah. That's it. That is what you are called to do. Micah doesn't offer anything else. But there is lots, lots more. Jesus offers that lesson in his infamous sermon on the mount.

Up the hill he climbs with his closest followers. They sit down and Jesus offers them words of great wisdom, "The Beatitudes." Recognizing their dedication and the challenges that lay before them, Jesus perceives it is time for teaching. The disciples were still new in their faith, infants in their understanding just how God's spirit works. **He knows there is more to this life of service than they can imagine, and he wants to tell them.**

Janet read for us the traditional version of the Beatitudes which many of you are familiar with. You probably had to recite them for Sunday school. But have you really ever understood them in any depth? I not sure about you, but I find some of the comments a little confusing. For example, one would wonder how you could be blessed if you are poor in spirit or when you are in mourning? Perhaps I can dispel some of the cobwebs.

Presbyterian Minister Eugene Peterson's contemporary understanding of Jesus' words in his interpretation of the Matthew reading are I think really helpful.

³ **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** Peterson suggests, you are blessed, or perhaps we could say fortunate when you are down, at "the end of your rope." That is because at that time there is lots of room for the spirit of Hope to enter. A new pathway has opened to God's encouragement.

⁴ **Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.** How can one possibly be blessed in mourning? Perhaps it is only when we have lost what is most dear to us that we can be embraced by the One, the Holy One most dear to you. Peterson suggests God comes in when grieving commences.

⁵ **Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.** Eugene Peterson's interpretation of this verse is brilliant. *"You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.* Just being who you are. Believing the words, I am a gift, I am loved, I am enough. How often do we chastise ourselves for not being good enough, for not doing well enough?

⁶ **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.** Peterson's interpretation suggests, ⁶ *"You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat."* God, the Holy, is the best meal you will ever have? What a super metaphor. When we hunger and thirst for truth, justice and peace, we become enthusiastic agents of hope. And we are filled with soul food in the process.

⁷ **Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.** Petersen sees this as you being blessed yourself when you care. At the moment of extending care to others, you find yourselves cared for. Isn't that what pastoral care offers to us? Isn't that how the members of our Good Shepherd's committee feel? When we give generously to others, we feel fulfilled. The heart swells, the spirit is lifted.

⁸ **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.** Being pure in heart according to Petersen is when you get *"your inside world – your mind and heart – put right."* If you are not in a peaceful place, living anxiously and stressed, how can you possibly have a calm and full heart? But if you are in a peaceful place, connecting with the Holy, your heart can be overfilled with joy. You receive as much as you give.

⁹ **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.** When we walk a path of peace that living becomes part of our persona. Our actions influence others and we change ourselves. In Pastor Eugene's words, *"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family."*

¹⁰ **Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** This has always been another difficult one for me. I'm blessed if I'm persecuted? Peterson turns that verse around. He celebrates the fact that our commitment to God can end in our persecution because *"persecution drives you deeper into God's kingdom."* Imagine that being persecuted can drive you closer to God. What an incredible insight.

The last Beatitude from Jesus' wisdom words, ¹¹ **Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely^[b] on my account.** How is that a blessing? Peterson helps us again. Every time someone lies about you or tries to discredit you, something good happens he suggests. *"What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens."* It is a blessing to us because we have an understanding that we are having an influence. Discretely, quietly, your

vision of a peaceful, justice and spirit filled kin-dom is taking root. Celebrate that says Pastor Peterson. And I say amen to that.

Sometimes we need to look deeply beneath the surface of scripture to try and discern what it is we are expected to learn or understand. Other times the intent is, as we say these days, as plain as the nose on our face.

Micah was crystal clear, live a life of service, justice, kindness and walking humbly with God, are essential tenets of faith. One could say this is a “just do it,” kind of theology.

Jesus’ essentials of beatitudes might be a little more obscured. But we know in his affirming the “just get out there and do it” ministry directive, he also was preaching about a sense of great personal fulfillment through discipleship. Personal affirmation, a full heart, a confident trust in righteous living, a peaceful and content soul and a gift of the Holy Spirit. What could be more of a blessing.

We give thanks for today’s scripture lessons and the gifts they bring. Thanks for listening, Amen