

THE MESSAGE for Nov 21, 2010

Micah 6:8

Walking Humbly With God

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A pastor friend of mine tells a story about taking his oldest son, Michael, to begin his first year of college at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio.

My friend writes...

The day we drove him to campus to get him moved into his dorm was a typical hot and steamy Ohio August day. I was not looking forward to carrying all of his stuff from our van up to his room. Much to my surprise and delight, when we drove onto the campus and parked in front of Michael's dorm, our van was immediately surrounded by about ten people in bright red t-shirts who took everything out of the van and put it all into Michael's room in a single trip. Our son was moved into his dorm room in about 45 seconds, and I never broke a sweat. Heck, I hardly had a chance to get out of the van before all of Michael's stuff was gone. It was amazing -- an amazing gift of grace and hospitality.

My pastor friend continued,

A few minutes later, I got to talking with one of the students milling around outside the dorm. When she found out that I was a Lutheran pastor, she told me that I should meet the university president because he's such a great guy and a great leader. I said that one day I'd love to meet him. She replied, "You can, right now; that's him, over there." She pointed to one of the ten people in red shirts who had emptied our van and carried Michael's stuff up to his room. Here was the president of the university, sweating up a storm, moving first-year students into their dorms. He wore nothing to identify himself. He needed no one to know that he was the president of the university. He was simply serving.

Imagine that! There's a word to describe people like that - *humble*. The word "humble" comes from the Latin word, "humus," which means *earth, soil, dust, dirt*. The meaning of that word reveals a certain tension for us as we consider the humility of being disciples of Jesus.

Here's the tension. On the one hand, we know that we are made from the dust of the earth and to dust we shall return someday. So we need not think more highly of ourselves than we ought. We need not be prideful. To be humble is to recognize that we are nothing more than dirt.

On the other hand, we are a special kind of dirt – dirt formed by God with a purpose. In the creation story of Genesis we're given a vision of God as the Creator, taking a handful of dirt, shaping it into a human being, and then breathing the Spirit of life into us. Genesis tells us that we are the crown, the pinnacle of God's magnificent creation.

Consider these words from Psalm 8:3-6. The Psalmist write...

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established, what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet...

You and I are nothing more than dirt. You and I are nothing less than the crown of God's good creation.

Humility then begins with knowing who we are and whose we are. We are nothing more and nothing less than what God has created us to be. We are God's handiwork. Say that with me – *we are God's handiwork*.

For the past two weeks, we've been talking about God's will for our lives revealed in Micah 6:8...

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

Two weeks ago we focused on what it means to do God's justice, which is not to see that "people get what they deserve," but to see that people get what they need to be whole in body, mind, and spirit. God's justice is that we seek restoration, not retribution.

Last week we focused on God's expectation that we love kindness – not just be kind, but love kindness. To do our part so that one and all experience God's *hesed* – God's grace. We learned that as we love kindness, we are motivated to do God's justice. They go hand-in-hand as we walk humbly with God.

This week we turn our focus to walking humbly with God. What does that mean?

It means a lot of things but most of all it means keeping our pride in check so that humility shines through. That's hard to do. Let me show you why. Check out this video about pride and humility.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z40KT8yzZak&feature=related>

I love that verse at the end of that video. It sums up this message for us here today. James 4:6, *God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble*.

Paul tells us, in Philippians, that if we want to know what it looks like to walk humbly with God, we need only focus on Jesus and align our lives to Christ. It's about focus and alignment with Christ Jesus. He put his personal agendas aside. He was

emptied of any self-centeredness. He saw others more important than himself. This is the King of kings living his life this way.

That's the walk Jesus walked. And that's the walk we are to walk. I find that walk a heck of a lot easier to talk about than to actually do. Don't you? Here's why -- we are all self-centered. We can't help it. It's part of our human nature. It's part of our survival tactics. We all struggle with this self-centeredness in one way or another. So let's admit the obvious -- we are self-centered. Say that with me, *we are self-centered*. Doesn't it feel good to say that out loud?

Abundant life according to Jesus isn't about survival -- it's about loving God and loving others. That is so tough to do for self-centered sinners like us. Yet, that's God's will for you and for me and all for humanity as God's handiwork. When it comes to walking humbly with God we are guided by three steps.

First step, confession. God invites us to get real with ourselves, to be honest about our self-centeredness, and to seek forgiveness. I got a confession here this morning. I haven't done anything ethically or morally wrong as far as I know. And I hope I never do.

But I have to tell you. There have been times over the past 6 years when I've allowed my self-centered agenda to supersede God's agenda for this congregation.

There are things I've said over these years that I wish I had never said. But I did!

There are things I didn't say that I wish I would have. But I didn't!

There are things that I've done in trying to lead this church forward through a transformation process that I wished I would have never done. But I did!

There are things that I know God was calling me to do in trying to transform this congregation that I didn't do but I wished I would have done. But I didn't!

20/20 hindsight truly is 20/20 vision. And with that vision I can see there were times when I have failed you. I'm sorry for that. I wish I could change all of that. But I can't. So I simply ask you to forgive me for my failings and shortcomings over the years.

I need to also tell you this - God has not failed you and God has not failed me. In spite of us God's will is being done in this place... (*This next paragraph was something I was thinking about but hadn't planned on sharing but I did...*)

So often we look at our spiritual leaders and we put them up so high and it's hard to live up to those expectations. We were watching the Jewel of the Nile the other evening - ever see that movie with Kathleen Turner and Michael Douglas? Michael is after the Jewel of the Nile which turns out to be a holy man. I'm sitting there on the

couch – and I’ve see this movie many times – I got to thinking sometimes I fail to be a holy man. Folks I’m human.

Truth is – serving as the spiritual leader here at Friedens has taught me a great deal about humility and the power of forgiveness. I’ve discovered (and I know you have too) that walking humbly with God involves forgiveness – forgiveness flowing freely into our lives and into the lives of those around us.

One of the joys of my ministry is to stand here in your midst every week and declare the forgiveness of your sins. It’s an honor and privilege for me to do that – a special moment in worship.

Forgiveness is the key for our life together in Christ. I was thinking about that “holy man statement” this week and it dawned on me – an unforgiving Christian is a contradiction in terms. An unforgiving Christian is like taking a shower without using any soap or water.

Now I need to tell you this with confession and forgiveness there is no need for finger-pointing or blaming. That’s not helpful. What is helpful is for each one of us to take a hard long look in the mirror at ourselves and

- realizing that we are dirt
- called to walk humbly with God
- admitting our own failings and shortcomings
- learning from our mistakes – wow – have I learned a lot over these years with you
- seeking to forgive and be forgiven.

Second step, submission. Sometimes I don’t want to do what I know God is calling me to do in order to continue transforming this congregation. The work of transforming a congregation can suck the life right out of you. Sometimes I don’t want to do what I know God is calling me to do in order to move this congregation forward. I do know that I need to be more patient in helping more and more people catch that God-given vision that God has placed on my heart.

Here’s part of that vision – God is calling me to make a difference in your life so that you are equipped to make a difference in the lives of those around us. I know God is able to take our faults and failings and do something good with them. I’ve seen it. You’ve seen it.

I’m convinced that God has big plans for this church called Friedens. I hope you believe that too. Lately I’ve been offering this little pray – *Speak Lord, your servant is listening*. Say that with me, *Speak Lord, your servant is listening*.

The listening part is easy – it’s the doing part I struggle with. Don’t we all?

That brings us to the **Third step, service.** I desperately want to do what God is calling me to do to lead this congregation forward. We worship a great God and we are called to be a great church. A church that is on the path of service.

My mission is to equip you for service in God's kingdom work in the world as we gather regularly, grow spiritually, and go faithfully. I'm inviting you to join me on this journey – finding new and creative ways for us to walk humbly with God. Serving others is the path we walk. Serving others, giving to others (especially those need) is a powerful way to walk humbly with God.

Look for opportunities this week and they will present themselves for you to serve others. For example:

I was at Turkey Hill the other day and a woman in front of me didn't have enough money to pay her bill, so she went out to her car to see if she could find the money she needed. I asked the clerk how much the woman owed. It was something like 72 cents. It was obvious coming up with the money was a difficult for her. I gave the clerk three quarters and said, "Use this to pay her bill but don't tell her or anyone that it was me." I walked out of Turkey Hill smiling as I said a prayer of thanks for the opportunity to touch a life with God's *hesed* – God's grace.

Walking humbly with God means, walking the walk that Jesus walked. He put his personal agendas aside. He emptied himself. He counted others more important than himself. May we walk *that* walk together – confessing, submitting, and serving others every step of the way. Amen.