

“Walk Humbly With Your God”

Micah 6:8, I Cor. 1:18-31, Matt. 5:1

Epiphany 4-A, Feb. 2, 2014

As I was studying the appointed Scripture lessons to be read in this worship service today, I was looking for some common ground among them; some common ground which I believe I may have found in the 8th verse of our Old Testament lesson this morning. The setting is a courtroom and here the LORD God almighty has filed a rather substantial lawsuit against his very own people; the people of Israel. Why? Because spiritually speaking, they were “talking the talk” but they were not “walking the walk!” Therefore the Prophet Micah asks them: “What does the LORD require of you?”

And then Micah, like many attorneys today, precedes to answers his own question: “You are to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God!” (Micah 6:8)

We know what it means to do justice! It means to live in obedience to God’s commands. It means to treat other people fairly; always, refusing to take advantage of them even when that possibility presents itself. To do justice is to live in obedience to the Golden Rule: *“Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you!” (Matthew 7:12)*

We know what it means to love kindness! It means to give other people the benefit of the doubt. It means to show kindness to others by being well-mannered. To love kindness is certainly to be gracious and merciful; above all, it means to be forgiving!

But what could it possibly mean for any one of us to walk humbly with our God?

(1) It could mean, in part, that we daily acknowledge our dependence upon him.

Our attitude should be that of the psalmist who says: *“Know ye the LORD, that He is God. It is he who has made us, and not we ourselves!” (Psalm 100:3a)* To walk humbly with our God might mean that we acknowledge our need for his Word to constantly guide us and to direct us in our daily lives! *“For we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture!” (Psalm 100:3b)*

(2) It could mean that we listen to the LORD God almighty when he tells us that his ways are very different from ours. In Isaiah, chapter 55:8-9 we read: *“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways,” says the LORD. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts!”*

Yes, God wants us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only! (James 1:22) -- But obviously there are times St. Paul would remind us in our epistle lesson today, when we can all become too smart for our own good!

St. Paul was certainly not trying to insult the recipients of this letter, when he wrote to them, saying: *“Consider your calling brothers! Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards! Not many of you were powerful! Not many of you were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong! God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God!”*

St. Paul was certainly not trying to insult the recipients of this letter, but he was calling upon them to do a reality check with him once more at the foot of the cross.

From a close study of I Corinthians, we know that there were some very educated, sophisticated people, who were very much a part of the great academic circles in Corinth; well-versed in the philosophy of the great Greek orators, who prided themselves very much in their human wisdom. And it is possible that some of these very scholarly men were drawn to the Gospel more for its intellectual stimulus, than they were drawn to it because they had become convicted of their own sins and now saw themselves in dire need of the grace and forgiveness of God, which flows freely from the cross in Christ Jesus.

Friends, St. Paul is really saying a lot, when he says to us in our epistle lesson today: *“The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God!”*

Five times, in eight verses, St. Paul uses a form of the Greek word for “foolishness” or “folly.” The Greek noun is *moría* and the Greek adjective is *moros*, from which we derive the English word “moron.” In Greek, the word *moría* (for foolishness) conveys the idea of something being completely ridiculous, ignorant, stupid and contemptible. St. Paul is stating his belief that most people in the unbelieving world consider the cross to be moronic!

Now, obviously there are many reasons for this, but probably the number one reason is because the cross offends our pride. It insinuates that you and are in need of some outside help; some help beyond ourselves, if we are to ever genuinely know God and to enjoy a relationship with him. St. Paul states the undeniable fact that for all its wisdom, the world has never been able to find the true God and that left to ourselves, apart from God’s great self-revelation, culminating eventually in his sending his own Son into the world to be our Savior and Redeemer, we would forever be groping around in spiritual darkness in an endless for search him.

But actually, the futility of this very search can now be used by God precisely to show us our helplessness, and so prepare our hearts and minds to receive Christ into our lives, who is *“the Way, the Truth and the Life!”* (John 14:6)

To the Jewish mindset the word of the cross was foolishness because it became a stumbling block to them. To the Jewish people it was incredible that anyone who died on a cross could possibly be God’s chosen One. They pointed to their own Hebrew scriptures where it unmistakably says in Deuteronomy 21:23, *“Cursed by God is anyone who is hung from a tree!”* Therefore, to the Jewish mindset, the very fact of the crucifixion itself, rather than proving that Jesus was the Son of God, in their natural minds disproved it!

To the Greeks, the word of the cross was foolishness too. For the Greeks believed in many gods and the gods they believed in were totally incapable of ever feeling any kind of real pain. The Greek word which they used to describe this was *apatheia*, from which we get the English word “apathy.” The Greeks argued that if the gods could ever feel any type of joy or sorrow or anger or grief, that this would then mean that human beings could somehow exert influence upon the gods, and in that moment, show themselves as human beings to be momentarily greater than the gods themselves. A god who suffered was to the Greeks a contradiction in terms. A suffering God to Greeks was an oxymoron. Since Greeks believed that the spirit or the soul of the man was the only part of him that was eternal, and that our flesh or bodies are greatly insignificant, because they decay and disintegrate after death, the very idea of the Incarnation, of God becoming a man was revolting to the Greek mind. This is why Paul says that the Gospel he preached was foolishness to Greeks.

This is why Paul says *“Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks!”* (I Cor. 1:22-23)

Paul even quotes Isaiah 2:14-15. *“For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart!’”*

Just think about this, dear friends, none of us could have ever come up with the plan of salvation that God did! For in the death of his Son Jesus Christ, God displayed his own sheer genius in masterminding a plan of salvation whereby, as Paul tells us in Romans 3:26, God remained both just and the justifier. If we had a million lifetimes to think about it and to create a means by which a holy God would accept sinful man, we could never come up with what took place at the cross. Only the inscrutable wisdom of God could have thought of it.

God designed his plan of salvation in such a way that a sinful human being could not come to know him by human wisdom, which if that were possible, would only exalt a human being. So God deigned to save lost sinners through a means that would seem utterly non-sensible to a “wise” world. In the cross, we see the wisdom of God most fully revealed.

In his infinite wisdom, God designed a plan that in no way compromised his holiness or left his righteousness unfulfilled. God's wrath has been poured out on human sin; whereby at the same time, His righteous demands have also been met, so that God is now free to receive sinners into his holy presence.

Friends, St. Paul was a man who came to walk humbly with God. And he even uses this type of language in addressing others. In Ephesians 5:15-20, St. Paul writes to his friends in Ephesus, *"Look carefully how you walk then, not as unwise people, but as wise; making the most of the time because the days are evil. Therefore do not BE FOOLISH, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit; addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father!"*

And doesn't all this tie in very beautifully with the first of his beatitudes that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ sets before us in our Gospel lesson today, as he begins to share with us his Sermon on the Mount. Jesus was also calling upon us to walk humbly with our God, when he says: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!"*

On the day after Jesus had fed 5000 men, in addition to many other women and children, the recipients of that great blessing came before Jesus once again and asked him a question that sounds very much like the question that the Prophet Micah asks of us in the Old Testament lesson today. They asked Jesus, according to John 6:29, *"What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" And Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God that you believe in him whom he has sent!"* (John 6:29)

Jesus is the one who fulfilled the law of God perfectly for us, and being without sin himself was the only qualified candidate alive in the world, to make a just restitution for all of our sins. This is the One whom St. Paul tells us *"was put to death for our transgressions and raised again for our justification!"* (Romans 4:25)

Walk humbly with your God! Did you see some of the many stories in the news this past week about the two very different dispositions being exhibited in public by the rather haughty and prideful Richard Sherman, a defensive back for the Seattle Seahawks, as contrasted with the rather humble and meek disposition of the quarterback for the Denver Broncos, Peyton Manning?

When Richard Sherman became part of the winning team that defeated the San Francisco 49ers, on January 19th, clinching a spot for the Seattle Seahawks a spot in the Super Bowl, he was interviewed on Fox Sports by a woman named Erin Andrews. He sure was doing a lot of huffing and puffing and bragging on his own importance to the team, in a way that offended a lot of people.

By contrast there is the remarkable career of quarterback Peyton Manning of the Denver Broncos facing Sherman's Seattle Haws in the Super Bowl. Manning's outstanding season has made him the odds-on favorite to be named this year's Most Valuable Player. In a recent poll, Peyton Manning was voted by a wide margin to be the NFL's most respected player. Manning said in response, *"It's always nice when you are paid respect by your opponents, the guys you play against. I know as a young player in the NFL, I remember some of my goals were to establish respect of all my coaches, my own teammates, and then my own teammates, and then my opponents. Football is a game where mutual respect between opponents is what all players strive for. It makes a better game!"*

George Washington Carver was an African American who died in 1943. He was actually born into slavery in Missouri in 1864. A highly intelligent man with an equal amount of ambition, George Washington Carver became a scientist, a botanist, an educator and inventor.

When the deadly assault of the boll weevil severely threatened the cotton industry here in the South, he did a lot of research to determine what other crops could be planted and thrive here in the South, suggesting such as peanuts, soybeans and sweet potatoes.

A devout Christian, George Washington Carver named his laboratory: *"God's Little Workshop."*

One day Carver reportedly prayed, "Dear Heavenly Father, Creator of all that exists, please tell me what the universe was made for?" God responded, "Ask for something more in keeping with that little mind of yours." So Carver presented a second petition. "Dear Heavenly Father, Creator of all that exists, please tell me what man was made for?" Again the Lord replied, "Little man, you ask too much. Cut down the extent of your request and improve your question." So George Washington Carver presented a third petition to the Lord. "Dear Heavenly Father, Creator of all that exists, please tell me what the peanut was made for?"

"That's better!" the Lord said, and beginning on that day George Washington Carver eventually invented 100 products to be made from peanuts, useful for the house and the farm; such products as peanut butter, cosmetics, dyes, paints, plastics, gasoline and nitroglycerin. He received numerous academic honors for his great work and achievements.

Friends George Washington Carver was a Christian gentleman who walked humbly with his God!

What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God! The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God! Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs! Amen