

Sermon 2 Feb 2014 “Reality and love in God connect”
Micah 6:1-8 Mt 5:1-12

Prayer: Lord God, as we abide in your presence, help us know your saving, loving actions. Strengthen us to do what is good-news in your eyes. Guide us as we walk humbly with you, and shape our lives to faithfully love kindness. Teach us and provoke us to acts of justice so that your kingdom comes. Amen.

I am beginning with a modern parable* today: It is about “a little puppy that noticed that whenever he was happy, his tail wagged, so he thought he had discovered the secret to happiness.

One day he shared the secret of happiness with an older dog. He said, "I have learned that the best thing for a dog is to be happy, and that happiness is in my tail. So I am going to chase my tail; and when I catch it, I shall have happiness.

The old dog replied, "I too believe that happiness is a marvellous thing for a dog, and that happiness is in my tail.

But I have noticed that whenever I chase my tail, it keeps running away from me; but when I go about my business, it follows me wherever I go.

How many of us are like that little puppy chasing his tail, trying to find true happiness that is always just out of our reach. What we need to do is learn that if we will just go about our business and trust in the Lord, happiness will follow us where- ever we go.” *Charles Kirkpatrick, www.Sermons4Kids, 2002 CV

‘Reality and Love in God connect’ is what I have called today’s reflection as it seemed to me that if God is not in the connection both reality and love become distorted and even disconnected, creating all sorts of mayhem! Of course today the boundaries of the discussion are the two focus scriptures from Micah and Matthew – both teaching on the reality of attitude, behaviour, word and action affecting the loving work of God, in Jesus in the world.

A reality I have discovered is that when we are busy engaged in being and doing what we are supposed to, **then** happiness follows. When we are unsure, too bogged down or going around in circles we get easily get disconnected from our life’s purpose of walking in faith with the Lord.

Christianity with its belief of it sharing and expanding on the Hebrew Scriptures teaches a linear progression of life. We do not cycle through life – death – life – death... rather we teach that each one of us has a once and only, unique life to live and when we die we return to our Creator. In faith we are taught we have life with that Creator after death – similar to what we have now – but different.

Addressing the issue of faith-life disconnected is one way to describe Micah’s challenge today, while addressing the issue of faith-life connected is what Matthew says Jesus was teaching. Happiness is a reward of being connected – really connected into the Kingdom of Heaven and making it come near enough to be visible and real. Whether we are on the receiving end or the doing end – happiness comes from bringing the kingdom of heaven to life.

SacraconversaZione says: “It is a serious mistake to reduce the summary of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew’s narrative to a code of ethics or even a sermon from a mount. It is more like a dazzling revelation that at first disorients then enlightens; that turns everything upside-down (or right side-up depending on the perspective!). Basic actions, of which anyone is capable with or without any particular preparation-- mercy, peace-making, "doing" justice, are the true and actual 'secrets' to a rewarding life. But the fact that gives this 'teaching' its authenticity is the cross.” cV

The cross is where Jesus took all the dis-connects and re-connected us in faith, by faith: it is when we walk beneath the cross that we must make a faith decision to accept Jesus as the Son of God – or not. In Him the kingdom of heaven is seen most strongly, and in following him, **his** ways, **his** teachings, **his** life’s patterns we are invited to bring the kingdom near enough to be seen, happiness is a reward.

It is a good-news reward for those whose needs are great: the hope-less, the grieving, the hungry and thirsty for righteousness, the harassed, and faith-insulted as much as it is a reward for those who offer mercy, purity, peace, and are humble. This is not an “either or” teaching from Jesus it is a “both and” because the reward of being happy is a result of being connected to God’s ways of living. The reward is for those who need and those who offer – a genuine meeting of action and word in real time! cV

Having said that W Loader would tell us that from Matthew’s perspective Jesus was more focussed on challenging his listeners to take up **new attitudes** rather than meeting the needs to whom the promises are made. So, the challenge was given: ‘if you want to enter the Kingdom, then these are the kinds of attitudes and behaviours you need to be living. Matthew’s focus was because he believed it central to Jesus message of calling us to live the right way – to live in righteousness. So, the teaching called “The Beatitudes” is a summary of how to live connected to each other, to God and still be good-news.

In this definition ‘righteousness’ is not some negative demand to withdraw from impurity, evil, worldly influences, and contamination nor is it some sort of permission slip to so spiritualise our faith that there is no connection between worship on a Sunday and the hungry children in Mangere, the McLeans teenager escaping into drugs, the Kindy mum numbing pain through alcohol, the dad desperately wanting to provide for his children who listens to gambling lies, the migrant abused by their employer, the, the list on our own doorstep of people needing *the secret of happiness* is long. Cv

Our righteous living makes the kingdom real, keeping the challenge alive for us to be the Good News of Jesus in what we say and do, revealing the secret of happiness! Jesus said we are happiest when we recognise, accept and live with God! When he taught the Be-attitudes, He was continuing the long line of faith’s teachers reminding us of our story from the beginning, and telling us of our part in it. cV

We belong to this living tradition of relationship between God and his people, further evidence of it can be heard in the anguished cry of God to ‘My people...’ from Micah. The relationship is not one way but initiated by God from the beginning. From the list of things God has done we are told of both the people’s faith and real life journey. Freedom from slavery; Political and religious leaders; Justice fought for and won – all were God’s righteous acts for his people.

When gifts of such magnitude are given how do you respond? In the traditional ways? Sacrifice was the dominant way and Micah doesn’t abolish sacrifice, but the prophet does force an evaluation of the intent of sacrifices. *He calls into contrast their attitudes to sacrifice **sharply** with matters of Justice and Righteousness. *HWallace Worship and loving our neighbour/ social action are connected in God!

One way I can describe what is happening in these verses is that God is identifying a dis-connect, but the leaders, those in the ‘church’ and out of it – don’t get it. Micah (and Isaiah) understand their part is to tell the story. Tell the leaders that *God is not impressed by correct and ostentatious, “loud” ritual when it is accompanied by injustice and abuse in other areas of life. For Micah, the exercise of justice in people’s lives, especially those in powerful positions, is an **essential** ingredient when it comes to seeking favour with God. *HWallace

What God requires is a sacrifice of the heart and spirit which is to be expressed both through justice and in a more faithful and humble sense of self in the presence of God. The Hebrew word translated ‘kindness’,/ embrace faithful love / or mercy in English Bibles is not easily translated. It is perhaps closer to ‘loyalty’, both in terms of **faith** toward God and in **action** issuing from such faith.

H Wallace says: “The summary the prophet gives has become one of the most momentous and far-reaching statements about religious practice in the whole of scripture.” **8** He has told you, human one, what is good and what the LORD requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.”

Happiness is when we go about our business connecting reality and love in God. Amen