The Old Testament text that we read earlier took us back to about 700 years before Christ, the people of Israel were in the midst of a spiritual revival. The temples were packed. There were signs of peace, prosperity, and many blessings. However, in the midst of all these “blessings”, the prophet Micah sensed that the people were not as devoted wholeheartedly as they appear. Their faith had been compromised and their worship of God had become more of a ceremonial ritual, or a mundane activity…instead of from their hearts. Their bodies might be physically there, but their minds and their hearts were somewhere else. Their once spiritual flame of passion had long been lost.

During the Old Testament days, the prophets served as the spiritual mediators between God and the people. It was the prophet’s job to keep people honest and accountable for their actions against God. The prophets must have the courage to tell the truths to the people, whether the people liked to hear the news or not. But that’s their job…to warn the people of God’s judgement while offering them the opportunity to repent of their sins. It was not an easy job, but somebody’s got to do it.

The prophet Micah recognized that despite all the superficial and outward signs of prosperity and blessings, the people’s hearts, their desires and motivations to worship God were simply not there. Their devotion and allegiance of faith had become stale and superficial. Some even took a step further by compromising their faith in worshipping other gods and practiced other forms of idolatory.

Instead of focusing their minds in honoring the true God - Yehweh, the people turned their focus upon themselves. They focused on their own personal needs and their own motivations and successes while demanding God’s blessings be upon them. Not only had they put other gods before the true God, they had carried out the sins of injustice and neglected the welfare of others, especially among those who were less fortunate than they were - those who belong on the margins of society, the outsiders looking in, the foreigners, the poor, the sick, the widows and orphans…just to name a few.

This was not the first time that the people of Israel had disappointed God or had failed to meet God’s expectations. Time after time, they had forgotten about the covenant that their forefathers had established. When things were going well, people tend to forget about God. They allowed their personal pride to set in. They made plans to satisfy their own interests and not God’s? How soon have the people forgotten?

Through Micah, God pleaded His case against the people but the people still did not get it. They claimed their innocence and stood firm of their unconfessed and unrepented sins. **What God ultimately demands is the total obedience and allegiance of our hearts, not our unintended and superficial sacrifice!** For it was written by the prophet Samuel, ***"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.[[1]](#footnote-1)***

Being righteous before God isn’t just about showing up physically but spiritually as well, or proclaiming ourselves to be more righteous than others. Somehow I don’t think that’s what God had in mind when we are called to extend mercy and make peace with all of God’s people.

“**What does the LORD require of us**?” as the prophet Micah asked. **God wants us to do justice** – to be a voice among those who are oppressed and voiceless, those who are vulnerable, the widows, the orphans, the foreigners, those with special needs, the elderlies, the sick and the poor. It’s about **putting God FIRST, others SECOND and ourselves LAST.** As Christ commanded us to *"****love one another as he has loved us.*** ***No one has greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. We are Christ’s friends if we do what Christ commanded us.”[[2]](#footnote-2)***

So this is what **doing justice**, **extending love and kindness**, and **walking humbly with our God** about. We may not be able to eradicate the systemic injustice of our world overnight, but that should not limit ourselves to dream BIG and to take small steps of our own in making a difference in the lives of others.

Earlier this week, I took part of the annual Mayor’s Interfaith Breakfast gathering among several hundreds of leaders across various spectrum of faiths. Among all the speakers who came to the podium, I was particularly moved by a member of the *Sikh Coalition*. His name is Dr. Simran Jeet Singh who is a faculty member at the *Union Seminary* in Manhattan. He shared from his heart about not only his own experience of intolerance and hatred imposed upon him and his community, simply by the outward appearance. Many associated them to be “terrorists” when in fact their faith is one that promotes peace and non-violence towards all. He talked about how our society today needs more “selfless love” rather than self-promotion. By his definition, “**selfless love” means one’s genuine love that focuses not upon one’s return of investment but the needs and the interests of others.**

The overarching message of this annual ecumenical event was founded upon the biblical mandate of ***“love one another as you love yourself”,*** but that’s everyone’s mandate, not just for the Christians, the Jews, the Muslims, the Buddhist, Hindus and others. Each year, leaders among the various faith communities lifted up our prayers and voices stood in solidarity in promoting LOVE rather than HATE in our city, in this country, and in this world. Last year, there were more hate crimes than any other years with the rise against the Jewish, the Muslim, as well as the LGBTQ communities. As one other speaker so eloquently spoke, “at the end of the day, the real challenge for all of us is, how may we preach the words of tolerance, acceptance and LOVE through our actions in our everyday living?”

***What does the LORD require of us…but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God?* How do we do that?** We do so by extending God’s grace and hospitality and welcome to another fellow human being in this world, one person at a time, one act of kindness at a time!

As another Christian theologian put it so well that ***God desires more than empty words [and promises]. God desires justice that is measured by how well the most vulnerable fare in the community.*[[3]](#footnote-3)**Those who are the least among us and the voices that are often silenced, reflect upon the greatest opportunity for God’s mercy and triumph. The last shall be first and the first shall be last.

In times like these in a contentious and divided society that we live in, we can easily focus on our own interests while consciously or sub-consciously compromising our human decency and moral concerns for others. We need to take a step backward in order to move forward. What does it mean for us to “walk humbly with our God”? To walk humbly simply means to “let someone else go first”. To honestly hear what the others have to say first, while practicing our own self-control in recognizing the *log in our own eyes, and not just the specks in our brother’s or sister’s.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

As we also read earlier in our New Testament reading, the Apostle Paul reminded the early church in Corinth and to us today that ***God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise and God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.[[5]](#footnote-5)*** We are called to be instruments of God’s grace in this troubling world. Our fear of the Lord ultimately leads us to wisdom in discerning what’s right and proper.

Later on, we will be installing a new class of officers who have said YES to their own calling. This confirmation of commitment is NOT to be taken lightly. Even though for many of you, this is NOT your first time standing before God in declaring your vows of commitment. It is my prayer that the vows that you will be rededicating today would resonate in your hearts and spur new sense of vision as the Spirit leads you and grants you wisdom through your humble walk with God. Let us seek justice, love kindness for others, and to walk humbly with our God.

Perhaps God is inviting us today to raise our prophetic voice like Micah, to stand with our conviction and to do what is right and just within God’s provision. Whatever we prayerfully desire to do according to God’s will, trust that God would stand firm with us until the end. God would not abandon God’s own. ***If God is for us, who can be against us?[[6]](#footnote-6)*** Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *I Samuel 15:22* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *John 15:12-14*  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Conners, Andrew Foster *Feasting on the Word Year A, Volume 1,* P.292 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Matthew 7:3* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *I Corinthians 1:25 and 27* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Romans 8:31 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)