

February 9, 2020  
Rev. Kerry Smith

Matthew 5:13-16 What Does the Lord Require? Do justice  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Matthew 5:13-16

New Revised Standard Version

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your [God] in heaven.

There are certain verses in the Bible that sum up the Christian life. Micah 6:8, which is on the front of your bulletin, is one of those verses for me. “God 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?” If the whole Bible burns up, I want that verse to stay. In February we are going to be looking at a different part of Micah 6:8 each week and today is do justice.

We know that our personal spiritual discipline and our responsibility for the world and its people cannot be separated. Our faith and our life intersect. They are both a part of the worship of God. The Christian life isn’t just me and Jesus because the gospel of Jesus is political. It was so political that Jesus was crucified by the Roman Empire. Jesus constantly challenged the political world of his own day, talking about how the Roman government oppressed the people with unjust taxes and laws. Jesus talked about the increasing gap between the wealthy and the poor. Jesus talked about the way the religious leaders tried to gain power at the expense of the most vulnerable.

Jesus’ first sermon in his hometown was based on the prophet Isaiah about doing justice and letting the oppressed go free. Later, Jesus asked his followers who they would worship, Caesar or God? Was it the nation first or God first? That is a question that is throughout scripture. Will you serve God or something else?

Greenland Hills is a special place. This is a family of faith that has a passion and a heart to do justice. Mission trips with Habitat building homes in El Salvador, building homes in Juarez with Proyecto Abrigo, and the Global Village Market that has raised almost \$400,000 in 13 years for our favorite non-profits organizations changing lives here in Dallas and all over the world. Our vision as a church is written on the front of your bulletin. Creating a multi-generational community engaged in advocacy and solidarity with the poor in resources and the poor in spirit.

We are people who stand with God in caring about what’s wrong in the world. God wants more justice in the world. “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). In Isaiah 1:17 God tells us, “learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” Do justice and stand up for what’s right, even when others don’t.

That means that we should care about people’s access to food. We should care about education, not just for our own children but for all children. We should care about a lack of jobs in our city. Theologian Walter Brueggemann says to do justice is to “be actively engaged in the redistribution of power in the world and to correct the systemic inequalities that marginalize some for the excessive enhancement of others.”<sup>1</sup>

I remember reading “Small Great Things” by Jodi Picoult. In the book, a Caucasian family stops an African American nurse from treating their child solely because of her race. While the child is being treated, a Caucasian nurse has to step away and she asks the African

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Brueggemann, Sharon Parks, and Thomas H.Grooms. *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly*. p. 3. 1986.

American nurse to watch the baby, and while she is watching her, the baby dies. The nurse is put on trial and her lawyer shares this metaphor. She says, “I feel like I’ve been standing underneath an open window, just as a baby gets tossed out. I grab the baby, right, because who wouldn’t? But then another baby gets tossed out, so I pass the baby to someone else, and I make the catch. This keeps happening. And before you know it there are a whole bunch of people who are getting really good at passing along babies, just like the people who are good at catching them, but no one ever asks who is throwing the babies out the window in the first place.”

Compassion calls us to provide food to the homeless, but justice calls us to address the systemic reasons for why there is the existence of a permanent underclass of people who are homeless. In service we read one-on-one with kids in elementary school, but justice requires us to work for equitable funding for all public schools. In mercy we pray for victims of gun violence but justice demands that we enact legislation that bans civilians and police from possessing and using military assault weapons. Justice calls us to fight against government policies that increase suffering. Justice calls us to speak truth to power.

There is this great story in Exodus of two women, Shiphrah and Puah. The king of Egypt had told them kill the newborn Hebrew boys, but Shiphrah and Puah engage in civil disobedience and they don’t do it. Their refusal to follow the law prevents a genocide of Hebrew children by the Egyptians. Maya Angelou says that courage is the most important of all virtues. She says you can be kind for a while, you can be generous for a while, even loving for a while, but it is only with courage that you can be persistently and insistently kind and generous and fair.<sup>2</sup>

In the Hebrew Bible we hear stories of prophets like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah who indict people in power for coveting and seizing the land and homes of others and for doing violence against the poor. Those prophets protested against political leaders taking bribes and religious leaders selling out for money.

When Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, we know that we are called to be that Good Samaritan who helps the person who has been hurt by the world. Doing justice means we work to transform the entire Jericho road so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life’s highway.

We heard Jesus’ sermon on the mount in Matthew’s Gospel. It is a new vision of the world. It is not what we are going to be, it is who we are. We are the salt of the earth and we are the light of the world. We are called to give light to all in the house. We are not too young or too old. We are not too rich or too needy to bring good news to the impoverished and to give a hand to the broken-hearted. We are called to take action and confront evil, to care for the vulnerable and to make right that which is wrong.

We are to welcome the refugee, to heal a broken planet, to feed the hungry, to build bridges of trust, not walls of fear. We are called to share our gifts, to seek justice and peace for all people, and to bring Christ’s light to the world. We are called to do justice to bring about God’s vision for a world where the weak are protected and none go hungry. A world where the riches of creation are shared, and everyone can enjoy them. A world where different races and cultures live in harmony and mutual respect. A world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love.

This week I heard Bishop Yvette Flunder and she shared about a dream that she had. In the dream she only heard one word. Jump. She started to bargain with the voice saying jump. She said, how about I get close to the edge? Jump. How about I pretend to jump? Jump. How about I

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.reservoirchurch.org/sermon/shiphrah-and-puah-the-courage-to-say-and/>

go on my tippy toes. Jump. In the dream she finally jumped and then she realized how wonderful it was. She wondered why she didn't jump earlier.

It takes courage to take a stand. It takes courage to do justice. The chasm is deep between justice and injustice. It is important to speak truth to power. Prayer and meditation help us to be brave. After all, as God is for us, who can be against us? Thanks be to God, Amen.