

What Does the Lord Require?
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Pray with me: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, Our Rock and Our Redeemer. Amen.

When the Wednesday Bible study group talked about the Beatitudes last year, the author of our study suggested that the Beatitudes should be understood as a ladder. If you are poor in spirit, then you are more able to mourn with those who mourn. Mourning gives the ability to be meek. Et cetera, et cetera. This is a reasonable understanding and I would suggest it can be applied to our reading from Micah, too, just backwards. What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. Thinking backwards, if you walk humbly with God, then loving kindness should come naturally and, if you love kindness then you will be compelled to do justice. I think the same applies to the Scout Oath. “On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.” If you are physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight, then it follows that you would help other people, that you would obey the Scout Law, which includes qualities like trustworthiness, loyalty, kindness, and reverence. If you are physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight, then it follows that you will do your duty to God and you country. Another ladder.

Scouts know that the oath is not meant to be observed only at scouting events and activities, but in the whole of life. We know that the words from the prophet Micah aren't to be heeded only when we are at church, nor are any of the other words of the Bible. The moral codes we follow with the Kiwanis or Rotary or Lions or Elks aren't meant to be upheld only at gatherings. We are called to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God in every aspect of our lives. And not on our terms. The people of Israel respond to God in our reading from Micah asking what God desires and they offer guesses: burnt-offerings? calves a year old? thousands of rams? tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Their suggestions begin from the ordinary in their lives – sacrifices to God of calves a year old – and proceed to the absurd. The biggest offering typically made was twelve rams; where would they even get thousands of rams? How would they grow and press tens of thousands of rivers of oil? They ask these questions not because they think God would actually want those things, especially their firstborn children, but because they would rather give God these things which they value over the things which God values: justice, lovingkindness, a humble walk with God.

Surely, the Israelites were not the first to offer God what mattered to them. Written in 1940 by John Betjeman is the poem *In Westminster Abbey*, set in wartime England.

Let me take this other glove off
As the vox humana swells,
And the beautiful fields of Eden
Bask beneath the Abbey bells.
Here, where England's statesmen lie,
Listen to a lady's cry.

Gracious Lord, oh bomb the Germans,
Spare their women for Thy Sake,
And if that is not too easy
We will pardon Thy Mistake.
But, gracious Lord, whatever shall be,
Don't let anyone bomb me.

Keep our Empire undismembered
Guide our Forces by Thy Hand,
Gallant blacks from far Jamaica,
Honduras and Togoland;
Protect them Lord in all their fights,
And, even more, protect the whites.

Think of what our Nation stands for,
Books from Boots' and country lanes,
Free speech, free passes, class distinction,
Democracy and proper drains.
Lord, put beneath Thy special care
One-eighty-nine Cadogan Square.

Although dear Lord I am a sinner,
I have done no major crime;
Now I'll come to Evening Service
Whenever I have the time.
So, Lord, reserve for me a crown,
And do not let my shares go down.

I will labour for Thy Kingdom,
Help our lads to win the war,
Send white feathers to the cowards
Join the Women's Army Corps,
Then wash the steps around Thy Throne
In the Eternal Safety Zone.

Now I feel a little better,
What a treat to hear Thy Word,
Where the bones of leading statesmen
Have so often been interr'd.

And now, dear Lord, I cannot wait
Because I have a luncheon date.

This bartering, this coming to God on our terms, this offering to God on our own terms, has been, and remains, part of the human condition and I dare say we will not be the last to try it.

Alas, Micah is very clear; there is no place for negotiation. Micah does not say “What does the Lord suggest of you?” No - what does the Lord **require** of you? Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God. The Beatitudes are often interpreted this same way, as commands on how to live our lives. To be blessed, which is **not** a synonym for happy, we think we should be poor in spirit, mourn, be meek, be merciful and pure in heart and reviled and persecuted. Something we cannot tell from our reading in English, though, is that the language is not imperative, like “Go!” or “Do!” For those who enjoy verb tenses, the language the indicative. For those of you, like me, who couldn’t describe the indicative tense to save my life, I’ll make it simpler. The Beatitudes are a reassurance. To those who are already hungering and thirsting for righteousness, to those who are making peace, you will be blessed in the time to come.

Just because the language is not commanding us, though, doesn’t mean we cannot or should not be merciful or mourn that justice has not yet prevailed and equity does not reign. These Beatitudes have a place in Micah. If we are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, are we not walking humbly with God? If we hunger and thirst for righteousness, are we not doing justice? So what does the Lord require? Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God. The list is so brief as to sound easy but we know that is not the case. It’s easier to offer God other things than our whole lives. Knowing that what God requires is so big could feel defeating or leave us dejected but that is not the intent of the prophet, nor the intent of any of the Bible (nor the Scout Oath nor any other pledge). Instead the words are meant to offer hope. Rather than be sad about what you have yet to do, take hope in the knowledge that you, and so many others, are working toward living into the goodness. What a great thing that people seek to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. What a great thing that you are one of many.

Let us pray: Lord, help us let loose that which we value so that we might embrace that which you value.
Amen.