

The fact is we are living in disturbing times. This is not an alternative fact. It's a fact that there is a great deal of anger and anxiety. It's a fact that millions of people, are taking to the streets here and around the world, worrying that the principal values of the nation – liberty, justice and the pursuit of happiness for all - are being disregarded. There is serious concern that our country that the Puritans once called a City set on a Hill, a beacon of light for refugees and poor wayfaring strangers, is systematically turning out the light and closing the door to immigrants, refugees and the poor. Millions of people are asking what do we do now? And, of course, there are others who say exactly the opposite is true. We are not of one mind. That's our context.

But dear beloved of God, this is the season of Epiphany during which we declare joyfully the Light shines in darkness and the darkness will not overcome it. For such a time as this, into our context, the Word of God – God's grace - comes to us through Micah and Matthew.

[...] What does the Lord require of us, is another way of asking what are we to do now? What the Lord requires, says Micah, is to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.

Easy to say, but what does it mean? In the entire Bible God's justice is measured by how the poor and vulnerable are treated. This is the only measure for justice. It includes the widow, the stranger, the orphan, the destitute and poor. Justice prevails when these people are protected and uplifted. Love kindness? Sure. Hallmark tell us that, but what does that mean? Chesed is the Hebrew word here and it refers to the kind of love that God has for people. To love kindness is to love others in the way that God loves people, with mercy. This is the call of the people of God: to love in the way God loves. Such love leads to walking humbly as God's companions. The poet Wendell Berry said "We've been talked out of love, mercy, kindness. We've got to take those things back." I believe this is our time. The Lord wants us to walk the talk, to be the companions of God in the world.

In Matthew's gospel Jesus shows us how to walk the talk, by describing people who are blessed. As disciples learning Jesus' way, we notice whom Jesus our teacher describes as blessed and happy. It is not the ones in power or those who boast of their wealth who find happiness. It's not those who torture others or those who banish the endangered who are blessed. It is not the mean spirited and arrogant who are happy.

No, our teacher says, look for blessing in the ones who are poor in Spirit, who recognize their own need for God. When I was visited the new shelter for homeless

women I was told the women shed tears of gratitude simply to have a bed and a clean, safe space. Jesus says this is what it feels like to be blessed. He teaches us to recognize blessing in the ones who hunger and thirst for what is right in God's sight. Our teacher encourages us to look for the blessed ones in the world and to walk as with them. In the movie Lion, a lost young child is desperately searching for home. He finds himself among beggars who offer him shelter and a bit of food in their company. Among the beggars we see mercy. Jesus says this is what blessedness looks like.

My brothers and sisters, these are disturbing times, we may indeed face persecution. But remember it has been true for others who have gone before us. Yet, Jesus our teacher displays a shocking sense of joy: Rejoice! Rejoice and be glad!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen