

*Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,*

Grace and Peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ!

Too often we take for granted the blessings in our lives. In fact, it takes the loss of our greatest blessings to make us realize how blessed our lives have been. But on those occasions when we do take stock, when we look on our children, or remember the time we came that close to dying, but miraculously didn't, or came into a nice warm house on a bitter cold day...on those occasions when we take stock, we find we want to do something for God.

So what do we do? Most of us come to church. Some offer prayers. Others sing favorite hymns. Still others read the Bible. All of which are good. All of which are pleasing to God, and inspiring and comforting to us. But if we really want to please God, then what is required of us is this: "We do justice, loyally love God, and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:1-8)

But how do we do those? Let's begin with doing justice. A little lesson in the Hebrew original of our text: the Hebrew word for justice used in this passage, is *Mispat*. It is a word that means more than that everyone gets his/her share. It means more than that the punishment fits the crime, or the reward adequately compensates the goodness. *Mispat* is a doing word. It means doing all you can to get the oppressed out from under the yoke of oppression. It means rescuing for those who are victims of injustice. It means working to see that that which is wrong is set right!

The people of God, who love God, who want to respond to God's abundant love for them, work for justice. They work to see that those who are oppressed by poverty are freed from the grip of poverty. It isn't enough for the people of God that they are comfortable, that they are pious. The people of God are earnestly distressed by the poverty of a stranger, so distressed that they work to see the stranger freed of the oppression of hunger, homelessness, desperation. The people of God, who love God, love God by working to see that victims of racism are given a fair chance. The people of God who love God work to see that the inequities in the way food, and fuel, and jobs, and money are distributed around the world, are somehow made more equal, even if that means that the relatively wealthy of the western world have to give up a few of our advantages.

Which I suppose, is what it means to be loyal to God, and to walk humbly with God. I have little doubt that what our worship, and our hymn singing, and our prayers are pleasing to God. But God has this peculiar fondness for the down and out. The fondness goes so deep that God once adopted the most down and out of the ancient world – slaves – and called them to be God's people. The fondness goes so deep that when God sent God's Son to the world, God sent the Son as a down-and-outer, rather than as a king. The fondness goes so deep that this Son of God once told all who would hear that the only real way to love God was to love the least of God's creatures, for whatever we would do to them; we would also do to God.

Something tells me that the Israelites might have preferred their burnt offerings, and their rivers of oil to the necessity of working for justice, loyally loving God, and walking humbly with God. Yet walking humbly with God itself means letting God set the agenda, letting God decide what is the best way to show God love.

We have been richly blessed. Because of the grace of God, we have been called to be a church, to be partners with God in the working out of God's will in the world. There are times when we would be tempted to drift, to offer our prayers, and our hymns, and our worship, and let someone else worry about the justice. There might be times when we think that justice is an inappropriate topic for the church – it smacks too much of politics.

Yet God calls us to obey. There are no threats, no thunderbolts, no dire warnings. There is only a God who wonders when God's people don't obey, what God has done to them, how has God hardened them?

Friend, God has blessed us. Let us respond, as the Israelites did, with devotion unto obedience!!!

Blessings! *Taka*