

“Walking Humbly, Together With Hope”

Micah 6:6-8

Pastor Charlie Berthoud | Sermon for Sunday, October 24, 2021

When I was 15, I went to summer camp in New Hampshire for a month, in large part because some friends did too. Every week, we did a two- or three-day hiking trip into the White Mountains. These trips sounded great, but I had never done anything like this before.



On my first trip, I quickly became weary and unhappy. The backpack was heavy, my boots hurt my feet, and we seemed to be hiking forever. I was tired and hungry and even a little afraid. But the counselors and more experienced hikers encouraged me and even took a few

things from my pack.

Eventually, getting to the top of those mountains and the camaraderie around the campsite made the effort worthwhile. If you've made a hard climb up a mountain with great views, you know what I mean.

I came to love those trips. I went back the following summer for two months, and I tried to help new hikers in the way that I'd been helped. I look back on those trips with gratitude for the natural beauty and the sense of togetherness, perseverance, and purpose.

Those kinds of experiences have helped me on the journey of faith as a

Christian.

For the past six weeks, we have been focusing on the journey of faith, encouraging each other to “get back on track” with the help of the delightful book *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, by pastor and author Adam Hamilton.

Inspired by the book, I have encouraged you to try various practices:

- Join us for worship these seven weeks
- Pray five times a day
- Read/study five minutes a day
- Do five acts of kindness per week
- Learn five things about another country
- Do five acts of generosity per month

I’ve heard from several people who have taken up the challenge and tried to do these things, which is great. I commend you.

Maybe some of you thought you might get a gold star or special sticker today. Sorry, that’s not happening. As we conclude the series, I have a word of caution.

The purpose of the series isn’t for us to accomplish things on a checklist and pat ourselves on the back for praying five times a day or reading the Bible for five minutes.

Just as the purpose of riding an exercise bike isn’t to be good at riding the exercise bike, but instead to be healthy and strong. The purpose of these practices isn’t to just get the practices done, but instead to become healthier and stronger and more alive as Christians.

The purpose is to live in new ways, to grow into the love of God, and make that love part of our daily living, to shape our words and decisions and our life’s direction, to give us strength for the storms, and peace in the despair, and courage to do what is right.

If we’re not careful, we could make an idol of our religious practices—worshipping those practices rather than worshipping God, loving our

neighbors, and working for the sake of God's Kingdom, God's Kin-dom. Our scripture reading for today cautions us against making idols of our religious practice, and the reading includes one of the best-loved verses in the Bible, but before we hear it, we need to set the context.

In the 8th century before Jesus, in the southern part of Israel, political and religious leaders had become corrupt and greedy. Worship services apparently became superficial shows of false piety, with elites seeking the blessing of God, while many people struggled with hunger and poverty. The prophet Amos famously spoke God's word, denouncing the false piety saying:

I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

—Amos 5.21-24

The prophet Micah voiced similar sentiments in the 8th century BCE. In the beginning of the small book, we learn of God's sadness, frustration, and even anger at the waywardness of the people, especially the religious and political leaders of the day (see Micah 3.2-12).

Some people thought the way to get back on track with God was with sacrifices, but God makes it clear that something more than even excessively extravagant sacrifices was required, with one of the best-loved verses in the Bible.

And interestingly, God also makes it clear that for the people this wasn't a new teaching; God had told them before, but they had ignored or forgotten the teaching.

Listen for God's word from Micah 6.6-8:

“With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
He 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?

Worship is important. Prayer is important. But what is most important in God’s eyes is how we live our lives.

God makes it clear in the well-loved words of Micah 6.8. I like the way the Common English Bible puts it:

**He has told you, human one, what is good and
what the Lord requires from you:
to do justice, embrace faithful love,
and walk humbly with your God.**

I’m glad to be at a church that appreciates this verse and the emphasis on putting our faith into practice, on learning AND living God’s love.

We focus on learning God’s love, not simply so we can be smart, but with the intent of sincerely living God’s love—making that love real in our families and neighborhoods and schools and workplaces.

We talk a lot about the journey of faith, knowing that life is full of ups and downs, twists and turns. We know that we live out our faith beyond the walls of the church building, or beyond the screens we watch.

We know that Jesus came into this world proclaiming a new reality, the Kingdom, or Kin-dom of God, calling people like us to turn around, to repent, to re-prioritize things. Just as Jesus called those fishermen to follow him and “fish for people”, Jesus calls us to discover new meaning and purpose in our daily living.

This really is the good news. Jesus invites us to walk with him and each other into new life and new purpose. We walk humbly and with hope.

We're trying our best here at Covenant to walk together in humility and hope.

Today is Commitment Sunday.

(If you're new here, please ignore this part.)

We are asking members and friends to consider making a financial pledge to the church, to support our ministries, to help us continue "on the way." Your gifts, and your pledges really make a difference, changing lives with God's love.

I really believe that this church is making the world a better place—rooting and grounding people in God's love and sending them out to work and school and family and neighborhood to do great things.

We're also asking you to commit to being an active and engaged part of the church community. Filling out a Serving Survey will help. Getting involved will help. Praying for each other will help.

So today, please consider renewing your commitment to God and to our church for the year 2022.

Today is the last day of the series on "The Walk."

Our hope with this series was to help each other "get back on track," in a really challenging time for our world and our country.

I've heard from several people who feel like this has been a time of renewal and refocus, a time of actually getting back on track, so that's great.

If you're not there yet, if you're still struggling and lost, if you don't feel "back on track" yet, don't worry.

We're going to keep walking—and we're going to keep encouraging each other and find the way forward.

My invitation to you on this Commitment Sunday is to make the commitment to the journey, to keep walking. Keep walking together with humility and hope. If you need help on the journey, please ask. If you can lend a hand to someone on the journey, please do.

A long time ago, in the mountains of New Hampshire, I learned that sometimes the journey is exhausting and even scary, but when we stick together and support each other, we'll make it.