

## CALL TO WORSHIP

From Micah 6:8

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

## Prayer of Adoration & Confession

Lord God. As we come to worship you, we pray that we may truly recognise your glory and majesty, and open our lives to its meaning for your whole creation. We come with hearts full of love and wonder. We come, asking that through our closeness with you, we may learn to follow the ways of justice in all that we do and say. We come, asking that in our love for you we may be ready to respond to your grace and to live as beacons of your mercy to all around. We come, asking that in our journey with you, humility may be our watchword.

Just as we pray that we may follow your ways to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly, so too we know that it is our nature to seek favour for ourselves, not justice for others. We know it is our nature to accept mercy, but to live in judgement over others. We know that our egos too often trump our humble intentions. So, Lord, as we pause in quiet reflection, we seek your forgiveness, and your restoration. Amen

## Silence

### Hymn Singing the Faith 8 – Watch on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkaih98SO2A>

God with us: Creator, Father,  
Bringing everything to birth;  
Mother of the whole creation,  
Fire of stars and life of earth:  
Down the countless years composing,  
From the earth's evolving night,  
Love's response to love, and forming  
Mind and soul to seek your light.

God with us: Redeemer, Brother,  
Friend for ever at our side,  
Here, in flesh, you walked among us,  
Taking up your cross, you died.  
Crucified, despised, rejected,  
Perfect Love who shared our shame,  
Streaming from the cross, your judgement,  
Full of mercy, clears our name.

God with us: Unwearied Spirit,  
From the birth of time and space,  
Surging through unconscious being,  
Joyful, Life-Creating Grace:  
Through the centuries you find us;  
You, as God, inspire our prayer;  
Life and Power at work within is,  
Love for ever, everywhere!

God, Transcendent, far beyond us,  
Closest Friend, unfailing Guide:  
Through the ages, wronged, affronted,  
In your poor, still crucified!  
God with us: convict, forgive us;  
By your holy love destroy  
all that hinders peace and justice:  
Fill this aching world with joy!

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## Scripture

Read

Read Luke 11:37-52

## Sermon – Seeking Justice

There is an age-old expression that things come in threes. It seems to be the only piece of wisdom politicians know. No matter what the question or challenge, there are always three parts to the answer. It feels as if it has been honed to perfection as what used to be three phrases becomes refined down to just three words divorced from any meaningful context. Those three-word phrases roll off the tongue in the hope of becoming deeply memorable, but of course, in the absence of context allowing an almost infinite variety of interpretations when called to account.

We might decry this trend of turning our lives into pithy statements riddled with ambiguity so that they are almost devoid of meaning, but we do need a little caution. Our faith too is often condensed into pithy phrases which convey so much meaning to those steeped in the context from which they are drawn. Which Christian doesn't draw from time to time on John 3:16 – "for God so loved the world that he gave his only son." One of those other familiar phrases is drawn from chapter 6 of the prophet Micah: "What does the Lord

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require of you, but to act justly, to love mercy and walk humbly with your God?" In this case, it truly is one of those three-part truths. Act Justly. Love Mercy. Walk Humbly with God.

Make sure everything you do is done with fairness, without prejudice and with integrity. That's about your impact on others setting an example of what is good and right.

Make sure that you are open to receive the undeserved mercy, grace and forgiveness from God – don't endanger your own sense of worth, by refusing to receive kindness and love from others.

Make sure that your achievements don't go to your head, and that, in humility, you dedicate those successes to the value of journeying through life with God as your constant companion.

Three characteristics which mark out a person as living in faith and truth with God. As Micah states, this is all God asks of you – Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

The simplicity of this statement almost masks its true depth when it comes to following those precepts and living out those characteristics. Nothing watered down or left too ambiguous in that little threesome.

I am sure it is with that in mind, that the Methodist Church began its two-year journey of exploration and discernment about its future strategy, under the heading "Walking with Micah". The church has spent the last two years under this banner of walking with Micah, seeking to rediscover a sense of calling and purpose, and particularly seeking to understand what it means to take the first of these statements seriously: – what does it mean to Act justly? Indeed, that question has been sharpened along the way – what does it mean to be a justice-seeking church? If we are to obey what the prophet tells us then in this world in which we seem to be bombarded from all sides by injustice, what are we going to do differently, how are we as a church going to behave differently in order to restore justice to the centre-stage of our thoughts and our deeds?

Knowing the significance of the Walking with Micah project, I was keen to seek out how the work was going to be shared with Conference, and how the ensuing discussions might shape the future of the church. Was it going to be all encompassing: how might it impact on local churches, or might it simply pass us by.

Armed with those thoughts, I turned to the agenda and papers going to the Annual Conference in June. Remember, this is in effect the governing body of the church, providing oversight, direction and accountability for the church. At first glance I was disappointed to scan through the agenda to discover that there were 52 items on the agenda – the vast majority the humdrum but essential activities of keeping the organisation ticking over. Walking with Micah was the only agenda item which jumped out as looking forward to the very purpose of our ministry, as distinct from just keeping the ship afloat. Seeing that imbalance made me realise just how easily we get drawn into the mundane of the status quo – just maintaining an even keel. Then I realised, just how much of our own church's activity is about everyday stuff. How easily, the everyday tasks consume all our energy and activity. It was a salutary reminder that we are not just keeping yet another organisation floating along, we are called to live out our lives by acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God.

So, as I turned to the report challenging us to do precisely that, I was pleased to see that it isn't offering another talking shop and yet more policy stuff to absorb into day-to-day running of the church. It is actually calling on us to refocus on what it means to be a justice-seeking church. This is not passive – it is active. It gives clarity and purpose to our calling to be justice-seeking in all its dimensions. The report calls us, no, instructs us, to seek out those places where justice is lacking. As churches, we need to find the space to understand what God places before us – how we mobilise in his name, and as the conference declared – understand what it means to be a justice seeking church. Not a cosy club, or a place to meet our friends, but a place in which we are challenged and inspired to demand a more just and loving world – just as God demands.

The report sets out six principles for justice, based on our understanding of God's stance on justice.

- **In the image of God** – each worthy of equal value and dignity

Justice demands that we confront racism and sexism and challenge division and polarisation of society which always seeks out the different to pick on and marginalise and humiliate. Dignity and respect and equality is for all.

- **flourishing of creation and human community**

This is not just about survival, or ticking along, or keeping your head down. This is about flourishing – being energised and ambitious and fulfilled – looking after creation and the environment – doing all we can to accelerate the move to net zero carbon – but doing that in a way which gives everyone a sense of place and purpose – bringing cohesion and belonging. Not being driven by profit and greed, but caring for each other.

- **God consistently shows a bias to the poor and excluded**

This is not just about caring for the poor and marginalised, this is about going out of our way to help them to flourish – not with patronising handouts, but with dignity and respect, and with a willingness to pay the price and disadvantage ourselves;

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- **those in power have a special responsibility for upholding justice**

A really tough message for leaders and decision-makers. With that privilege comes even more responsibility for honour and integrity, and being the first to lead the way in what is right. It means recognising when that is our role, but also recognising when we have to hold others to account for their special response to their privilege.

- **all people and nations to work for peace, justice, liberation and transformation**

if only! there is so much hard battle to stand for peace and justice.

- **live in hope, in ways that reflect God's character.**

Perhaps the most important of them all – not only to hold onto hope and live out our lives in hopefulness, but to reflect the very nature of our hopeful God, in the way we do this.

As Jesus challenged the pharisee in our reading from Luke's gospel, he was critical of the talk of justice and faith, which was at cross purpose with their practical action, and their continued injustice to the needy.

I see the power and burning ambition of God's nature set out in these principles, and I see dangers of an apathy and a tiredness and a lack of agency to believe and act in a way that makes these things possible. My challenge to you as a church community is to fire up that spirit to take ownership of God's demand to be an active, justice seeking community.

### **Prayer for the world**

We pray for a world in which all are equal, the value of difference is respected and those on the margins are embraced in fellowship.

We pray for a world in which the beauty of creation is protected, in which its resources are no longer plundered, in which all life may flourish, and in which the cohesion of community is central to human endeavour.

We pray for a world in which the poor and disadvantaged are favoured, and in which the rich take responsibility for sharing the fruits of their wealth and privilege.

We pray for a world in which leaders and decision-makers accept their responsibility and use their authority to lead by example as stewards and servants, for the greater good of all.

We pray for a world in which peace, true peace, prevails, and in which the oppressed are set free, the fearful are set at ease, and the mighty are humbled.

We pray for a world full of hope. Amen

### **Hymn Singing the Faith 713**

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8CIU66oFMQ>

Show me how to stand for justice:  
how to work for what is right,  
how to challenge false assumptions,  
how to walk within the light.  
May I learn to share more freely  
in a world so full of greed,  
showing your immense compassion  
by the life I choose to lead.

Teach my heart...  
Teach my heart to treasure mercy,  
whether given or received-  
for my need has not diminished  
since the day I first believed:  
let me seek no satisfaction  
boasting of what I have done,  
but rejoice that I am pardoned  
and accepted in your Son.

Gladly I embrace...  
Gladly I embrace a lifestyle  
modelled on your living word,  
in humility submitting  
to the truth which I have heard.  
Make me conscious of your presence  
every day, in all I do:  
by your Spirit's gracious prompting  
may I learn to walk with you.

Martin E Leckebusch © Kevin Mayhew Ltd

### **Blessing**

May all strive to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with you, all our days. Amen,