



Triptych – Oil on canvas by Whitehorse artist Neil Graham, based on Micah 6: 6-8 “What does the Lord require of you – to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.”

Micah 6: 6-8

The Bible speaks - there is no question about that. It has quite a repertoire of voices, don't you find? And tones?

There are some passages of scripture that simply sing....other that wail, still others that shout, some even that whoop cheer and stomp their feet.

This one, it seems to me, whispers. Whispers in ... in a *stage* whisper, meant for everyone to hear.

Whispers....like a parent prompting a four year old who has memorized her part in the play and then freezes in front of the audience. You know that scene...the child knows it by heart...has gone over and over and over the lines, and yet, when it counts....when grandma is right there in the front row.....nothing. And the parent whispers the linesmouthing them with that “you can do it” look in their eyes...that’s what this text feels like to me. Whispering because it’s telling us what we already know...whispering so we won’t feel embarrassed for having forgotten AGAIN. Whispering the lines *with* us, willing us to remember and join in.

(whispering, parental tone) “God has told you what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? Come on...you know!” And we *do* know. And sometimes - like 4 year olds before the audience of relatives - we freeze, and we forget, and we turn and hit our sister because we don’t know what else to do.

Yes, this text whispers.

Whispers like the parent with a teenager in the kitchen, one in the morning...home late after sneaking out even though they’ve been grounded. There have been words like “After all I’ve done for you”

And “we talked about this a thousand times and you agreed you’d not do that again” and in response “You’re trying to ruin my life, mom, you’re not fair dad – what do you WANT from me?” and the sound of adolescent feet stomping up the stairs

And the aching, tired, verge-of-tears whispered response to the retreating cloud of indignant hormones “you know what I want. All I’ve ever wanted for you. Be kind, do what’s right, andlet me love you.”

This text whispers.

Whispers too like that same parent, standing with the child years before, when loving was easy and natural, crouching down, pointing to the two year old, his first year to really be aware, pointing as the Christmas tree lights are turned on for the first time. “Look” the parent says “Look! Isn’t it wonderful? Look there – and there!”

A breathy call to wonder. A gentle voice saying look, there’s more – there is so much more. Let me show you how holy, how sparkling, how incredible the world can be. Look and then look again! There is so much more to – to all of this life – than we’ve even begun to imagine.

A whisper like that. Go deep, it says. Go deep. Don’t settle for the surface. There is wonder, there is depth, there is more going on than we can see or know.

This triptych captures some of that wonder. The more you look the more you see. Justice, mercy and humble walking – that trinity of holy living – there’s more to them than at first would appear.

Justice, not merely in the courtroom setting – certainly that though, and beyond that, the Biblical notion of justice as right relationship, fairness, respect and dignity in the way creation exists together. Starting with an attitude of the heart, a desire for things to be – right. Fair. Justice that flows like a mighty river, as Amos the prophet says...and washes clean all the ways this world is twisted away from the truth.

Mercy. The Hebrew word is “*hesed*” with a harsh “ch” at the end I’m told. It comes from a deep place, even physically. “*Hesed*” Mercy. Loving kindness. Look at the images...mercy at the places we’re most vulnerable. Not sympathy, or a kindness that touches only the mind, an idea of the other, the one suffering, that can be sated by a donation to a cause. Mercy that wrenches the heart and demands a response of the soul. Mercy. Loving kindness. *Hesed*.

And walking humbly with God. Humble. Humility. I love that word...its root is in the word for earth. The word that means earth, humus...is the root word for human...to be human is to be of the earth...humility means to be one with the earth, to remember we are earth creatures, rooted and grounded quite literally in and on this little planet our home. Dependent for our very existence on six inches of top soil and a season and the fact that it rains. One with all the other living things in our frightening and glorious vulnerability. Walking humbly with God.

I invite you to look deeply into yourself...into this work of art. There is so much more to see! Justice. Mercy. Humbly walking with your creator – these things surpass all other calls from the creator. They fly in the face of any who would claim some kind of hierarchy in the eyes of God...these gifts, these voices, these are for all living things. Justice. Mercy. Humble walking with God. The whispering voices of these things say “here is a place upon which to build your relationships with other religions, with other cultures, with life forms not your own...with the earth itself” The colours whisper it...the lines, the forms...universally accessible even though the images are specific. That’s how life is. Above and through the specifics of individual human lives run the colour and form of what we all hold most dear and the One who calls us to immerse ourselves in that above all.

There is so much more than we know, the painting says. The scripture whispers. There is so much more. Micah paints with words a picture of human life going on, above and over it all, the place where God dwells, if we only took time to look. In Micah the scene is a courtroom, above the daily round. We, busy living our lives, and something else, something divine happening and we don’t know it; we haven’t taken the time to look. The scriptures whisper – look! Listen – if you think this is all that’s real...you’re just not paying attention! This triptych whispers to our eyes...look! Look at the top – what ARE those figures? Angels? What are they up to? There’s a whole world of reality that, if we took time to ground ourselves and quiet ourselves ...would become clear - and who knows what would happen then? One of those figures is poised like a child in a level three dive, just waiting, it seems, for ...for what? To dive into the realm of human life...what is that angel waiting for? Me to notice, or ask? Could it be that simple? The piece speaks. Asks questions. Suggests. Offers a simple form...and invites us to fill in the detail.

These things whisper to you of your own creation in the image of the Holy. And look at the image of the Holy here...can you find it? A trinity, you can find them in each panel....find them, watch which way they are looking in each one...what does this tell you?

Justice, mercy and walking humbly. These things, in the end, are our lifeline and our future. They begin and end in the heart of God. These are the very nature of the Divine. They are our heritage, our legacy, our home.

They whisper today a message of hope and unity –

May we listen and look well.

And All God’s people said -

“Amen”

Praying with Micah

In this type of prayer, you quietly and honestly examine your day. First, read Micah 6: 6-8, aloud. Sit with it in silence for a few minutes, then read it again. Imagine that in the sky there is a vat that holds all the justice, mercy, and kindness of the day just past; and there is another vat holding all the things that deny those things.

Go slowly through the day you have just lived, reliving conversations and actions and thoughts, placing them in one vat or the other. Did your words and actions contribute to the amount of justice, loving kindness, and mercy in the world?

How is the balance, at the end of the day? Which vat is more full today as the result of your living?

Sit with thankfulness for the ways you have lived this vision. Let yourself feel the goodness of having done that.

Now make any decisions you need to make concerning the things that have not been congruent with Micah's call.

Offer all your day, the good and the bad, to God. Ask God to be with you in the day to come, giving you whatever you need to live with integrity and justice, love, and kindness. Close with an expression of thanks for God's gentle, persistent encouragement, for God's belief in you to carry out this vision.