

Those Pharisees knew very well what Jesus was talking about. But the greater issue was that they did not “understand” what the Scriptures said; they did not bring God’s word to “life” among the people they were responsible for. We have that very same challenge in our lives—to bring God’s word to “life!” And we find God’s word here in the Scriptures.

You cannot read the New Testament apart from the Old. *Go and learn what this means*, Jesus told them. It was God’s message to them...to the whole nation spoken by the Prophet Micah before the Exile. *I desire mercy, and not sacrifice*. Micah was preaching God’s indictment against Israel for the broken relationship that existed between them—between them and God; a relationship broken by the way they lived; by the attitudes they kept that guided what they did.

*Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel who abhor justice and pervert all iniquity who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong. Its heads give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for hire, its prophets divine for money; yet they lean upon the Lord...* It was to those “heads of the house of Jacob” that God directed this message of condemnation. It was to those “heads” God informed that he would *assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away...and I will make the remnant and those who were cast off a strong nation*. The lame were driven away because only the “whole” could worship God. Only the “whole”—those perfect in mind and body, could participate in the festivals. There were laws regulating who could and who could not come close to the perceived presence of God in the Temple. And in the end, the ones in charge of keeping those laws became richer and more and more powerful and lost the essence of their calling; that to serve God meant to serve God’s people—to *serve*—not *be served*.

Through Micah, the people of Israel were reminded of God’s expectation for them; for them to do justice; for them to love kindness; for them to walk humbly with their God. As God’s people professed to be in relationship with God, that was the character their lives were to exhibit as they lived in relationship with God. To do justice—and they already knew that that involved protecting those who were oppressed; those who had no voice of their own; who lived on the fringe of any community because of poverty or illness or because of their place in the pecking order of society; God’s justice meant not only protecting them but reaching out to them—to the “lame;” having that initiative about them to as their mission in life to take care of them.

And to love kindness—they knew full well what God expected there. They had experienced the kindness of God. God chose them, calling them to be God’s own people in the first place. God heard their cry and delivered them from slavery in Egypt; led them to the land of milk and honey—provided them a place to plant their vineyards—a place to find their livelihood and prosper. God had been kind to them out of God’s own pure sense of “goodness” and called them to be kind to others—it is called sharing the grace—the unconditional love God has for us with others.

And finally to walk humbly with God—not to live with that air of entitlement but to live with an attitude of thanksgiving for the grace of God in their lives; with an understanding of their dependence upon God for everything in their lives—even as they *worked* for it—seeking God’s guidance; acknowledging God with thanksgiving for what they had; understanding that apart from God in their lives there is no real peace in life; no sense of wholeness and joy. To walk humbly is always to recognize that God is God and

we are not, and yet as the Psalmist says, we have been made a *little less than God and have been crowned with glory and honor; given dominion over all that God has created*. God has given us a place in creation that is second only to God.

All this was a part of Israel's history with God; and maybe history is a poor choice of words—because it *is* part of the living relationship God has with us—with those people of Jesus day—with every Pharisee and scribe and Temple priest—and with us—with you and with me. To “do” justice; to “love” kindness; and to “walk” humbly with God; this is God's call to us. It is not a motto or an inspirational saying. It is a call to a *way of life*—every one of those calls a verb—a call to action; a call to an attitude towards all we do. The Pharisees were fully aware of their call and yet were walking around murmuring over the apparent grace of God at work among the people; that grace extended by Jesus as he welcomed sinners and tax collectors—welcomed them and took the time to invite them to his house and break bread with them. These were people the Pharisees would drop in an instant from God's “A” list of preferred and accepted people—actually not have to “drop” because they would never have considered they had a place on the list to begin with.

As if to underline the point that God's grace is not our possession to regulate and guard with our lives and reputations, we have the story of two miracle healings that follow. First a synagogue leader comes to Jesus, confident that he can bring his daughter of 12 years back to life—and Jesus follows him. And on his way to the synagogue leader's home—a woman with a hemorrhage that has plagued her for 12 years, follows Jesus until she gets close enough to reach out and touch his clothing—she confident that she will be healed—and she is. After a brief conversation with her, Jesus continues on to the home he is being led to, and proceeds to bring the dead child back to life. These two stories of healing serve to underline Jesus' message to the grumbling Pharisees. Everything Jesus does comes through the power of God working through him. Only one sent by God would have the power to heal and bring back the dead. The words he spoke to the Pharisees are therefore God's word to them; a wake-up call to them to heal the relationship they have with God; to reach out to God for that healing; a call to bring their dead ministry among the people to life as they remember their call—to do justice; to love kindness; to walk humbly with their Lord.

These two stories further underline God's proclaimed intention to *gather the lame and those driven away* as Jesus does a couple of things—both forbidden in the eyes of their religious law. First, a synagogue leader invites him to come immediately to his home—even though Jesus is at that point “unclean,” having entertained tax collectors and sinners in his own home. Second, the healing power within Jesus that is from none other than God Almighty, restores the life of a woman—doubly unclean to Jesus because she is a woman and not permitted to touch him, and because she is bleeding, she is not even permitted to be within the confines of the town—walking about in public. All those restrictions vanish in the eyes of God—this healing proclaims. *I will gather the lame and those driven away*, is the message here from God. Jesus has come to bring *that* news to the Pharisees as well—that a new age is proclaimed by God—a call for a restored relationship that is there for all to enjoy—for all to reach out and touch and secure for themselves. This new life from God is not bounded by the Temple or the priests or the Pharisees or by any human inclination to restrict it or regulate it or deny it any way. God's grace is there for all—for any—for us; and as we have known that same grace in

our lives, we should only be more and more willing to share what we've known with others.

We wonder what we should do as followers of Christ. We wonder what we should be doing as the church—as Christ's Body blessed by God to live in community in this church. And that always works its way out through our lives in specifics—this calling of God upon us. Yet we have some guidelines from Christ—all a part of the mission of Christ coming to live among us. First and foremost, Jesus reminded God's people that they are to love God with all their heart and mind and soul and might and to love their neighbor as themselves. We begin there—always with love for God which will ever be interpreted through our lives as we love others—it is God's love becoming over and over our own for others and for situations that will demand more love than we can muster on our own.

And then we go on from there in this relationship we keep as we look at *how* we love. Do we do it with justice—with that drive to help those who are unable to help themselves—and I know we are challenged by the circumstances we see—but we are able to help others; do we? And do we love with kindness? Again, we will be challenged in that, especially when we feel we have been taken advantage of or when we become frustrated over the circumstances or behaviors that we are trying to address with God's "love;" yet Jesus reminds us each and every one and each and every time to be kind—to walk with compassion; to realize that it is God's love and not our own that we are able to respond with; to see our cup full and overflowing and have that same hope and desire for everyone else. And finally, do we walk humbly with God? Do we recognize the mercy and kindness God has for us—to be a part of our lives; to love us to death—even to death on a cross; to bring us into full communion with no reservations with God's own self—to be present in our tiny, little lives as if they were the most precious thing in God's own? Do we realize that God is God Almighty—Holy and Wholly Other—All Knowing—All Power—"All"—and bestows honor upon us and reaches out to us with a desire to be a part of our lives; to bring peace and wholeness to our lives that we can know in no other way in this world? Do we live with a heart of gratitude towards God—in love with God; grateful every day that God will be a part of that day and we can rely upon him?

We're well past ending for today; so let's end with asking ourselves "do we?" As we live out our lives as disciples of Christ; as we put our hands to the task of being his church—do we live with grace unbounded? God would have it so. Amen!

"With Grace unbounded?" Matthew 9:9-13,16-26 060808 Mkh