

SERMON for Epiphany 4 – February 1st, 2026.

Readings: Micah 6: 1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31; Matthew 5: 1-12.

I try not to get political in my sermons as it is a sure way of dividing a community, even when the majority is in agreement with what you are saying. Saying that, I don't apologize for where this sermon might go, if you are feeling sensitive to some of the political machinations which are around at the moment.

Thank you for the kind comments on my sermon last week, as we try and negotiate our way through these political and social turmoils which impinge on our own lives – our peace of mind – spiritually and emotionally.

A couple of people spoke to me after last week's service asking, "yes, but what can we do", "how can we live a life of faith believing in goodness and love when such horrors are happening elsewhere"?

We do live in a world shaken by conflict, inequality, dishonesty and moral confusion. News headlines remind us daily that truth and compassion often take a back seat to power and self-interest.

As we often ask, during these times, "*How do we remain faithful witnesses for God's justice, truth and love?*"

Living in this beautiful, relatively peaceful backwater, part of the planet, what contribution to the well-being of the planet can we make?

Our lectionary readings this morning, in my humble opinion, couldn't have been picked any better to address this question.

I believe, whether we like it or not, whether or not we are aware of it, we are witnesses, but to what are we witnessing?

Jesus told his disciples that the world would know, would recognise, that they / we are his followers by the way we loved each other. Not only those we feel comfortable with, but those we feel uncomfortable with.

In a world marked by so much anger, division and self-interest, we are called to be witnesses for good – living testimonies of God's justice, mercy and love.

Witnessing at home, at work, online, doing our shopping, driving our cars.

Witnessing with our words.

Witnessing by our attitudes, not only to those "out there" but to those we deal with day to day.

Witnessing by the choices we make, in our everyday, ordinary lives.

At the school in Esperance where I was honorary chaplain, one of the "codes of conduct" which was impressed upon the students was to "choose your attitude". In other words, be mindful of your words, attitudes and actions and take responsibility for your own behaviour.

Another learning curve came from a previous Archbishop I worked under. He would ask the support staff after Synod how they were treated by those who attended, especially those who would come in to serve the meals. He felt that how we treat those who are helping or serving us is the real reflection of who we are and how we live and who we are as a Christian community.

Fairly recently, I was reminded of a favourite 1990s catch-phrase for many Christians looking for guidance at pivotal points in their lives. I gather Revd Sue mentioned it in one

of her sermons around Christmas time: “What would Jesus do” and every now and then I still see bracelets etc. with WWJD on them in Christian bookshops.

Our readings today can be looked at in two ways. They either have a lot to say about what is expected of us or they can act as a sort of road map, as we seek to live our lives as followers of Christ.

Micah is writing around 740-720 BCE, at a time of great uncertainty, with the northern kingdom of Israel having disappeared and great empires rising and falling all around them. The main points of Micah’s message concern the plight of the poor in his country and the way they are treated by those with power and influence.

Verse 8 is one of my favourite Old Testament passages, and one of the ones which has had the most influence on my life:

“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?”

This is how God wants us to lead our lives: To work for and do justice - to see that justice is done wherever it is in our power to do it, and to speak out and use our influence where we can.

To love kindness - to be gentle, caring, and compassionate towards those around us.

To walk humbly with your God - to love God and to seek to deepen our relationship with God and to know and acknowledge that all that we are and all that we have comes from God.

This is not ritual religion – I am a Christian because I come to church every Sunday – but relational obedience – God calls me to love my neighbour, to care for them, and it is by this love, others will know that I follow Jesus the Christ.

In today’s world, to **act justly** means standing up for truth and fairness despite pressure and even danger to us to compromise.

To **love mercy** means showing compassion and forgiveness in a culture of bitterness and revenge.

To **walk humbly with God** means resisting arrogance and pride, choosing dependence on God’s wisdom rather than all that glitters and attracts in our, oft times, shallow world of celebrity and glamour culture.

Don’t get me wrong, this isn’t easy, this isn’t comfortable, it could open us up to personal danger in the wrong places, but our witness, as Christians – Christ followers – today, begins with hearts aligned to God’s heart for justice and mercy.

My “Doom Scrolling” from last week hasn’t abated, although I find, mercifully, I am not so addicted to reading everything which shows up in my news feed. There have, however, been some inspiring pieces which have filtered through from Church leaders and even some politicians who have been visiting Minneapolis, in the United States, in the last few days.

While the situation there is beyond awful, they have reported “a revolutionary love” as people come together to resist. There has been a radical change in the city, where neighbour looks out for neighbour, where people are buying and delivering groceries for those too frightened to leave their homes. There are rosters of mothers who watch over schools, to protect the little ones from being taken, and caring for those children who discover when they come home from school at the end of the day that their parents have disappeared. A true witness to loving their neighbour.

Our Psalm asks the question: who may come close to God. The answer for many of us may be a bit confronting as we blunder our way through life:

- those who walk blamelessly, do what is right and speak the truth from the heart.
- those who do not slander, nor do evil, nor reproach their neighbours
- those who despise the wicked, who honour those who fear God, who stand by their promises no matter what
- those who lend without interest, who do not take a bribe.

In other words, a call to live with honesty, integrity and generosity – this is the call to which our lives must give witness.

In our Epistle reading, Paul talks about God's wisdom and power in Christ – that the foolishness of God is wiser than any human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Then Paul exhorts us to consider our own calling and I love this bit:

... not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world. [1 Cor 1: 26-28]

God chose ordinary people and continues to call the 'you' and 'me' of society, to spread the good news.

Finally, we have our Gospel reading, *The Beatitudes*, which in themselves are a challenge for us to live and witness to our counter-culture values – choosing humility over pride, mercy over judgment, peace over division.

For Jesus blesses not the powerful or the popular, but the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart and the peacemakers.

This is regularly dismissed in our current "dog-eat-dog" world.

Kindness may be mistaken for weakness.

Peacemaking may invite criticism.

Righteousness may be misunderstood as arrogance and rejected.

But we are called to live lives which are different, because this is the way we, you and I, reflect and give witness to God's kingdom - not the world's - and it is as important now to stand firm, to give witness to Jesus as never before.

People around us may never read the Bible, but they read **us!**

They watch how we treat people we disagree with, how we speak when we are hurt, how we react when most wouldn't blame us for being selfish.

You are probably sick of me quoting from Gandhi:

You must be the change you want to see in the world.¹

But I believe this is what we are called to do, to be: - bringing light into this world, speaking the truth without cruelty, standing firm without losing love – this is how Christ is made visible, how we become witnesses for good, - not just in church, but in our homes, in our communities and beyond. We are, if you like, the pebble dropped in still water, and the ripples of love, respect, compassion and service spread outwards.

Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God, and in doing so, I pray the world will see, not just us, but Christ living in us. Amen.

Revd Sally Buckley
February 1, 2026.