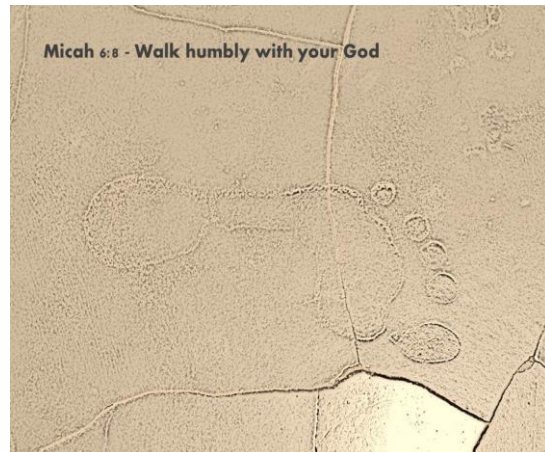


# Worship for Fleet URC & Beacon Hill URC

Sunday 9th May 2021



Led by Rev'd Howard Sharp

Opening music: Hosanna to the living Lord

## Welcome & Gathering Prayer     Margaret Armes

Let us be still for a moment as we draw near to worship God...  
Take just a few seconds to remind yourself why we are gathered together today... Listen, God speaks even through the background noise of the world around us...

Lord God, in this short time together, open our ears and our eyes to see your vision for this place and our part within it. Teach us, hear our prayers and enable us for service wherever you might take us, to your praise and glory. Amen.

## Call to worship

**Hymn:** Sing for God's glory *Tune: Lobe den herren*

Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation,  
racing across the sky, trailing bright clouds of elation;  
sun of delight succeeds the velvet of night,  
warming the earth's exultation.

Sing for God's power that shatters the chains that would bind us,  
searing the darkness of fear and despair that could blind us,  
touching our shame with love that will not lay blame,  
reaching out gently to find us.

Sing for God's justice disturbing each easy illusion,  
tearing down tyrants and putting our pride to confusion;  
lifeblood of right, resisting evil and slight,  
offering freedom's transfusion.

Sing for God's saints who have travelled  
faith's journey before us,  
who in our weariness give us their hope to restore us;  
in them we see the new creation to be,  
spirit of love made flesh for us.

## Prayers of Adoration, Thanksgiving & the Lord's Prayer

Gracious God, as we gather in our homes today, physically apart but united by our fellowship in Christ, we dare to ask that in some way you will meet us as we try to honour you in this time at home and yet together.

So we would give you thanks today for the gift of life with all its benefits and experiences  
- for moments of joy and delight,  
for moments of insight, the experience of learning,  
for times of growth and the deep wonders of love.

For these gifts of love of yours to the human family we say thank you now - and yet our hearts turn to praise, as we discern, through our faith in Christ, what such love costs.  
We are humbled as we think of his humility, his compassion, and his commitment to truth and his reaching out to all in need.

Accept our gratitude and praise and our desire to let his Spirit live in us today as we bring before you  
the weakness of our human life  
and the strength of all we are.

We bring the doubts that disturb us  
and the faith that forms our lives.  
We bring our disillusionment and pain  
and the flickering hope that is never put out.  
The strain of relationships grown weary  
and the joy of glad friendship.  
We bring the tasks that have become burdensome  
and the joy of work well done.  
We come, ill clad, to this time of worship and so we ask  
that you will clothe us with your truth  
and let your love for us call out your praise.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord AMEN

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven  
Give us this day our daily bread.journey  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and  
ever. Amen

**Reading: Micah 6: 6 – 8** read by Steve English

**6** "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? **7** 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?"  
**8** 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 the Word of the Lord      **Thanks be to God**

**Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:1 – 8a** read by Elizabeth English

**1** If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. **3** If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.  
**4** Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant **5** or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; **6** it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. **7** It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **8** Love never ends.

This is the Word of the Lord      **Thanks be to God**

**Reflection:**

I was once discussing with a friend what we understood by the word, salvation. My friend said "Well, I've accepted Jesus into my life so I know where I'm going when I die."

I wonder how many Christians see their faith in that way? See their salvation as something that is offered to us for when we die.

I'm not going to speak about what happens when we die because I don't know and the Jewish and Christian scriptures are not as clear about this as we may think.

I'm not a Christian because of what I hope for when I die but because something about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus makes sense to me for living life NOW.

In the autumn and approaching winter of my life (I am 71) I wanted to assess and reflect on what is significant to me in my faith and I keep coming back to a phrase written some 2700 years ago by the prophet, Micah, "Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God."

Earlier this year I received an email from a friend in California in which he quoted Charles Dickens, with reference to a mutual friend of ours.

*"It is not possible to know how far the influence of any amiable, honest-hearted, duty doing man flies out into the world, but it is very possible to know how far it has touched oneself in going by."*

It was that thought which triggered this attempt at a sermon/ reflection - ordinary people doing ordinary kindnesses with little thought to themselves.

Micah, the prophet, was writing some 2700 years ago and is offering a critique of much of the religious practice of his day, where it appears that many people went through the form of religion but neglected its essence.

The Jewish sacrificial system allowed the guilt that people felt about their way of life to be assuaged by the death of an animal offered to God.

This contrasted with the ethical demands of the prophets that put justice and mercy, in practice, ahead of ritual religion

It wasn't that this in itself didn't demand sacrifice, but a sacrifice of a different sort - a sacrifice of a self - centred life to other- centred living.

It is not that Israel, or people in general were ignorant.

*"He has told you"* says Micah *"You know"*

Doesn't that echo what our parents said to us, as children and what we have said to our children/ grandchildren,

*"You know I've told you shouldn't do that! How many times have I told you, you have to learn to share."*

You can sense Micah's exasperation as he reflects on his nation's elite.

So let's look briefly at these 3 requirements

1 Do justice. This is not simply a request to live justly (which it is) but to DO it. To see that it is done.

Justice is systemic as well as personal.

Later in the chapter Micah lists some of the systemic failures of the powerful:

dishonest weights - cheating in business

violence

bribery, lying, abuse of power.

The challenge here is to recognise that the more successful, powerful we become in our social, professional, political careers, the more important it is for US to live justly as an example and to promote justice with the power and influence we have.

Personal integrity is vital. If the people in leadership do not lead by example, then however gifted they may be, they will be sowing the seeds of their own demise.

Doing justice had these 2 prongs - living justly ourselves and working for justice in the political, social and economic spheres which we can influence.

2 But justice needs to be tempered by MERCY.

We read in that famous reading from I Corinthians 13 that “Love does not keep a record of wrongs”

One of the hardest things in life is forgiveness.

Forgiveness would require a whole series of sermons to plumb its depths - all I can do here is to suggest that an attitude of mind that regards human frailty in everyone, including oneself, and is willing to try and understand another's actions and circumstances which may have led them to causing offence, pain and distress, all this is the first step on the journey.

It doesn't mean 'letting off' the person who has done us wrong, but a willingness to move forward and try and create a new good from the damage done and to allow the possibility of a new beginning. This is behind a prison system which seeks not simply to punish but to rehabilitate and reform.

In preparing couples for Christian marriage I have often asked what they would do if their partner had an affair that they had admitted and regretted. Most said it would be the end of their marriage. I then said “Who do you love more, your partner or yourself? Is the pain you feel greater than the love you have for someone who has done wrong and confessed their mistake?”

Some interesting discussions ensued.

3 Do justice, love mercy and WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD.

“Humility”, someone said, “is the Grace that, when you know you've got it, you have lost it.”

A song I learned as a teenager in my Christian Youth Club went like this

*“I sat on the top of a mountain and thought*

*‘How little I am in it all.*

*One star is bigger than all of my mountain,*

*How little I am in it all.”*

Perhaps such a sentiment is the beginning of humility.

Michael Ramsey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, commenting on this verse from Micah, said “Many people can and do the first two requirements - justice and mercy, but far fewer walk humbly with God.”

He believed there was an “extra” that many good people missed.

I have quite a few friends who are not Christians and would class themselves as agnostics/atheists, who live very good, decent and honourable lives, just as moral, or more so, than some Christians I know.

I do believe they are missing something, or rather missing out on something, missing out on what I would describe as the conscious connection with the source of life that Christians call God, whose human face we have seen in Jesus, the one in whom “we live and move and have our being.”

I use the word “conscious” because I don't believe this “God force” is inactive in the life of people who do not profess faith in God.

God is the creative force in ALL life. You might recall these words in the hymn “Immortal, invisible, God only wise” that sums this up

“In all life Thou livest the true life of all”

That conscious connection that believers have, can, through prayer, reflection, fellowship and study, be a source of motivation, strength, love, compassion and challenge that inspires them to act justly and love mercy.

But it does not preclude others from such activity.

Wherever mystery is acknowledged, beauty admired, wherever love is celebrated and compassion practised; wherever selfishness and the ‘me first’ philosophy is genuinely challenged, the needs and values of all creation are recognised, and a degree of humility in the face of the wonder and mystery of creation is felt, we will find the kind of people that Micah was describing - people who want to

see and work for the kind of society that we Christians call the kingdom of God.

One Christian writer put it like this.

*“Humility is the place of entire dependence on God, is from the very nature of things the first and highest duty of humankind. It is the root of every virtue. And so pride, or the loss of humility, is the root of every sin.”*

I think Archbishop Michael Ramsey would have agreed.

Do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.

God’s invitation, God’s challenge and even God’s demand.

### Prayers of Intercession & Concern

Gracious God, we give you thanks for the call of Jesus who said “Follow Me”, not out of a sense of his own greatness but because he was rooted and grounded in your love and wanted all people to experience that love as he did.

Help us to have the courage to follow him, both in personal commitment and in his message about your kingdom and its values.

We pray for integrity in the corridors of power, both in our country and the wider world.

Integrity in facing the COVID pandemic as not a localised problem but a global one

Integrity in maintaining democracy where people hold opposing views, recognising the humanity of those whose views are not held by those in power.

Integrity when political leaders face the temptations that come with power, and wisdom and courage in facing those temptations.

We ask for your strength for all those facing adversity, adversity caused by war, poverty, ill health, persecution and exploitation.

We bring before you the people of Myanmar in their response to the army coup, the citizens of Hong Kong, the Uyghur Muslims in China

We pray for refugees throughout the world, with no place to call home.

We pray for the people of India and all those suffering the ravages of COVID 19 through illness, bereavement and fear of the future. We cannot articulate their needs but we pray that courage, hope and human ingenuity and compassion may abound and that, where possible, our love, prayers and action may help.

And we pray, closer to home, for those amongst family, friends, colleagues and neighbours who are facing life’s difficulties  
*(Silence for personal prayer)*

May those whom we have named before you be strengthened by their faith, our prayers and your presence with them, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. AMEN.

**Hymn:** ‘I have a dream’, a man once said *Tune: Repton*

“I have a dream”, a man once said,  
“where all is perfect peace;  
where men and women, black and white,  
stand hand in hand, and all unite  
in freedom and in love.”

But in this world of bitter strife  
the dream can often fade;  
reality seems dark as night,  
we catch but glimpses of the light  
Christ sheds on humankind.

Fierce persecution, war, and hate  
are raging everywhere;  
God calls us now to pay the price  
through struggles and through sacrifice

of standing for the right.

So dream the dreams and sing the songs,  
but never be content:  
for thoughts and words don't ease the pain:  
unless there's action, all is vain;  
faith proves itself in deeds.

Lord, give us vision, make us strong,  
help us to do your will;  
don't let us rest until we see  
your love throughout humanity uniting us in peace.

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## Blessing

Closing music: Humbly I adore thee

Responses led by Karen Smith

Opening music from <https://www.smallchurchmusic.com/Snippet/S-HosannaToTheLivingLord-PipeLC-48-CAM.mp3>

Closing music from <https://www.smallchurchmusic.com/Snippet-2010/S-HumblyIAdore-AdoroDevote-PipeLC-48-CAM.mp3>

Hymns: Sing for God's glory [STF 116 - Sing for God's glory part of Singing The Faith; Contributed by Paul Wood & Ian Worsfold | The Worship Cloud](#)

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