

Epiphany 3

“The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time....So Jonah went out and said to Nineveh....which was an exceedingly large city.... Jonah cried out, ‘forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ And the people of Nineveh proclaimed a fast and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. When God saw what they did....God changed His mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and He did not do it.”

These words from this week’s reading in Jonah seem very prescient as our country has gone through a rather jarring three weeks. We faced some extremely dangerous behavior and then went through what seems to have been a safe transition to a new Administration. And once again, thanks be to God, we have followed the historical transference of power.

Another Old Testament figure, the prophet Micah, offered some other words that might serve us well as we continue to attempt to become the nation that our Founders envisioned for us. Micah wrote, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.”

“To do justice.” That is a simple charge. As we walk together in life, treat each person with equity and integrity. Simple, but life and forms of prejudice, fear and yes, selfishness, seems to get in the way of such a simple charge. Plato, in one of his Socratic dialogues, wrote that we are doing justice when we are personally living up to our own understanding of whom we are each called to be. To do justice it is incumbent upon us to know what is right and when we act otherwise, whatever the circumstances, remember the people of Nineveh, acknowledge our indiscretion and work to make amends.

“To love mercy.” To love mercy, in one sense, begins with the realization that innumerable persons have been gracious to us in our lesser moments; moments when we exhibited jealousy or openly offended by word or deed. There is a real sense that loving mercy is in fact an act of thanksgiving. We learn to care for one another when we remember that our parents or friends or even strangers showed us a

a kindness when we knew in our hearts and minds that we were really not deserving of such thoughtfulness. Mercy is not just caring about another's well-being or their circumstances, but remembering what was offered and given to us as individuals and being grateful and thankful to be of value and offering substance in their life in ways that sustain and strengthen them.

“ And to walk humbly with our God.” This can be the toughest of the three admonitions from God as presented by the prophet Micah. So often we may hear from folks, including clergy persons, saying in specific situations, this is the will of God. I would suggest that some things seem obvious but to pretend that we can know the absolute will of God is presumptuous at best. We as people of faith are called to read, to study and to pray in ways that serve to open up God and God's call upon our lives. We pray that what we do and how we respond in life is fulfilling God's call upon us. Sometimes we respond in ways that are really colored by our opinions and our prejudices but seem appropriate and fulfilling of God's will for me at that moment. But is it God or is it I who is the motivator of a specific action or response at a given time? One of the ways to deal with such situations is to respond to God's questioning of our consciences by asking us, “Hey, what are you doing and why are you doing it?” And in our healthy moments we will take the time to discern how we respond, and at that time, learn once again that however haltingly, we are “to walk humbly with our God.”

To do Justice, to love Mercy and to Walk Humbly with our God is an admonition that may serve us as well as a citizen, a patriot and a country dealing with our neighbors.

Amen