

Scriptures

Micah 6:6-8

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?

Psalm 15

¹ O Lord, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?
² Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right,
and speak the truth from their heart;
³ who do not slander with their tongue,
and do no evil to their friends,
nor take up a reproach against their neighbors;
⁴ in whose eyes the wicked are despised,
but who honor those who fear the Lord;
who stand by their oath even to their hurt;
⁵ who do not lend money at interest,
and do not take a bribe against the innocent.
Those who do these things shall never be moved.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,
“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”
²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.
²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no one might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom

from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

[Anthem:](#)

Sermon:

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

¹ O Lord, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?

This question that opens Psalm 15, really is **the** question, it's the only question. Dwelling on the Holy Hill and abiding in God's tent, these are both ways of describing being with God. Who can be in God's presence, and how do we enter in?

The Psalmist places the bar pretty high:
Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right,
and speak the truth from their heart;
³ who do not slander with their tongue,
and do no evil to their friends,
nor take up a reproach against their neighbors.
Those who keep their word even when it costs them,
who do not take a bribe, nor lend money at interest.

This sounds like a challenging list of behaviours. I think I can do most of them, most of the time – the doing no evil to friends, that should be fairly easy. Speaking truth and keeping our word is usually not too hard. The lending money at interest is a problem though – a long time ago we moved from a production based economy to an interest based economy – if we have any savings or investments at all then we are guilty of lending money at interest.

Does this then bar us from being in the presence of God? Does the fact that our economy and culture is based on a prohibited practice exclude us all? That's going to depend on how we understand coming to God.

In the passage from Micah we get a picture of how many people think we approach God. In Micah the people of God are on trial. They stand accused of turning away from God, of forgetting who they are. They are no longer acting as God's people – they are acting just like the nations around them.

When the people hear the accusation – they of course miss the point. Do you want more sacrifices, God, they ask – burnt offerings and yearling calves? Then they start to get sarcastic - Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? They are insinuating that God is demanding of them something that they cannot provide, that God's demands on them are too high.

Finally they become downright offensive, saying 'shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' This is in reference to the god Molech that was worshiped by some other nations, and at times by some of God's own people. This god demanded burnt children as a sacrifice, something that Jehovah condemned.

God's response to his insolent children is surprisingly mild and quite simple. Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly before God, is the response. God bypassed the whole question of sacrifice. The reason for that is that while the people were giving offerings and following the required cultic practices, they were also trampling upon each other.

Community leaders would make a grand show of piety in the temple, while at the same time their predatory land practices were depriving fellow Israelites of their inheritance; their sacrifices were made with wealth generated at the expense of the poor and vulnerable.

Somewhere along the line they had forgotten that they were slaves who had been set free by the grace of God, and started to think they had earned their freedom; that they were worthy, entitled.

At the root of this backwards thinking is a fundamental misunderstanding about our relationship with God. The following questions will illustrate the misunderstanding.

Does authentic spirituality follow the pattern of Babel, with human beings constructing towers to heaven using our own spiritual wisdom and philosophical insight? Or does it follow the pattern of Sinai where knowledge of God results from the sovereign, divine decision to come down from heaven and establish fellowship with humanity?

Are we climbing towards God, are we figuring out God through our reasoning, or does God reveal himself to us? The fundamental error in us trying to reach God is that we have to assume that we know who God is, and how to get to him. This leads us nowhere.

In the Corinthian reading we see the futility of our efforts. Paul writes 'the world did not know God through wisdom,' and he goes on to describe how the Jews demand signs and the Greeks desire wisdom. The Jews are heirs to a tradition of dramatic divine interventions, so they demand divine signs of power. The Greeks, on the other hand, desire wisdom, the religious insights they recognize as valid are those based on philosophical reason. In both cases, the failure to recognize God's salvation in the world in the person of Jesus Christ is a result of prior expectations about what God's work must look like. Both the Greeks and the Jews suffer from blindness because of their human religious preconceptions about what God must be like.

The truth is, no amount of reasoning or worldly wisdom will ever lead us to Christ. Christian discipleship is not the product of some breakthrough in human insight, nor a new philosophy of life, or a set of rules for happy and fulfilled living. The heart of Christianity is rather a bold historical claim about what God had done on a hill outside Jerusalem during the reign of Pontius Pilate.

Human wisdom can lead us to the idea of a creator God, but human wisdom will never lead to the crucified Christ, who is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. This is critically important as we seek to answer the psalmist's question of who can be on the holy hill, who can be in God's presence. It is Christ. The anointed Messiah is the one who can be in God's presence, and through him, so too can we be.

But we won't find Christ through our own efforts at building towers to heaven. We won't find Christ through worldly wisdom or philosophical reasoning. We find Christ as he is revealed to us, and to perceive the revelation we have to drop our preconceived ideas of who God is and what God wants. We don't need to offer outrageous sacrifices but rather we simply need to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly before God, and the last is the most important one. It is only when we learn to walk humbly that we will come to learn and understand how to do justice and love kindness, and it is only when we walk humbly that we will realize we don't need to travel to the holy hill, and only by walking humbly can we become open to the revelation of God in our midst.

I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.