

## Proper 26 Year A 2011

This week in a conversation here at St. George's a quote from the Prophet Micah was brought to mind. In this scripture of the Old Testament Micah is telling the people what the God requires saying. "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? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' 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?"

So God requires and desires from us to act with justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. What comes to you when you think about being humble? In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew says, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." And what we hear in this morning's Gospel is similar. "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted."

Sir John Templeton called it "The Humble Approach. Templeton was an American-born British stock investor, businessman and philanthropist. He was a mutual fund pioneer who became a billionaire with his globally diversified mutual funds. You might have heard of the Templeton Growth Fund. Perhaps being rich and successful sent him in search of humility. He was a member of the Presbyterian Church and was dedicated to his faith. In what I could find Templeton also remained open to the benefits and values of other faiths. Commenting on his commitment to what he called spiritual progress he said, "But why shouldn't I try to learn more? Why shouldn't I go to Hindu

services? Why shouldn't I go to Muslim services? If you are not egotistical, you will welcome the opportunity to learn more." He created the Templeton Foundation and one of its major goals is to financially support the work of spiritual discoveries. The Foundation encourages research into "big questions" by awarding philanthropic aid to institutions and people who pursue the answers to such big questions through "explorations into the laws of nature and the universe, to [ask] questions on the nature of love, gratitude, forgiveness, and creativity." Templeton asserts that the purpose of the Templeton Foundation is to persuade people that no human has yet grasped 1% of what can be known about spiritual realities. So they are encouraging people to start using the same methods of science that have been so productive in other areas, in order to discover spiritual realities. ....And one last thing about Templeton is that in 2005, he wrote a brief memorandum predicting within five years that there would be financial chaos in the world. It was eventually made public in 2010. He died in 2008.

The humble approach, whether Templeton lived the humble approach or not I don't know but it's definitely congruent with the Gospel. Apparently the Pharisees of early Christianity taught humility ...but despite their teaching they were hypocrites. They didn't practiced what they preached. Perhaps they had forgotten "to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with their God." It would seem that they were in search of other things. They were cruel and unfair. They weren't sincere but dishonest and wanted to be treated better than everyone else.

I'll tell you a Hasidic story about a little boy playing hide-and-seek with his friends. For some unknown reason his friends stopped playing while he was hiding. He began to cry. His old grandfather came out of the house to see what was troubling him and to comfort him. After learning what had happened, the grandfather said, "Do not weep, my child, because the boys did

not come to find you. Perhaps you can learn a lesson from this disappointment. All of life is like a game between God and us. Only it is God who is weeping, for we are not playing the game fairly. God is waiting to be found, but many have gone in search of other things.”

The Pharisees offer a good example to those who have gone in search of other things, to those who don't play fairly. What Jesus and the Gospels tell us is that God is found in mercy, God is found in justice, God is found in kindness, and God is found in humility.

We have about one month until we celebrate our national feast of Thanksgiving, however you give thanks on this day. And the same amount of time before we begin the season of Advent and a new church year. So I want to offer this from the Benedictine nun, author, and speaker, Joan Chittister. This exercise is from her book *In a High Spiritual Season*. I've made copies which you'll find in the parish hall. You can listen now and pick up a copy to remember after the service. I want to challenge all of us to take up this practice for the next 30 days.

Joan Chittister writes, “Try saying this silently to everyone and everything you see for thirty days and see what happens to your own soul: ‘I wish you happiness now and whatever will bring happiness to you in the future.’ If we said it to the sky, we would have to stop polluting; if we said it when we see the ponds and lakes and streams, we would have to stop using them as garbage dumps and sewers; if we said it to small children we would have to stop abusing them, even in the name of training; if we said it to people, we would have to stop stoking the fires of enmity around us. Beauty and human warmth would take root in us like a clear, hot June day. We would change.”

So let me begin and say that by the grace of God, ‘I wish each of you happiness now and whatever will bring happiness to you in the future.’ Amen.

*Excerpts taken from Synthesis*