

“Do Who You Are”
 Micah 6:6-8
 Matthew 5:1-12
 Rev. David Hutchinson
 Sunday, February 2, 2020

Is there anything - - SIMPLE - - about being a follower of Jesus?

What do you think?

I would say “YES”.

Or more precisely: “Yes - - IF...”

Yes if - - by simple you don’t mean EASY.

OR - - to put it another way - - being a follower is BOTH

- - DIFFICULT - - and amazingly SIMPLE.

If you don’t totally agree yet - - give me a minute more to make my case...

Both of the readings for today are WELL KNOWN to people who read the Bible.

And both of them are fairly simple to remember.

Micah says: “Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly”

Simple. / A simple sentence - - that’s easy to remember.

In the New Testament, Matthew lists a bunch of simple phrases.

Taken together they are often called the “Beatitudes”

which means “the blessings”

They all start with the phrase: Blessed are the...

Blessed are the poor - - the meek - - the merciful - - and so on.

Again simple. / Simple phrases that are easy to remember.

You might even go further and say that the kind of people described in this list from Matthew are - - simple people. / The poor in spirit, the meek, the hungry or the pure in heart - - might also be described by some people - - as simple people.

By that I mean - - simple - - as opposed to powerful, glamorous, and extravagant.

Simple is the opposite of:

Fancy - - or elaborate - - or ostentatious - - or pretentious...

Blessed are the simple - - might be a summary - - of Matthew's list.

So being a follower of Jesus is - - about being simple.

Do you see what I mean?

Then - - if you compare Matthew's list to the three things on Micah's list in the Old Testament - - there are similarities. / Micah lists: justice, kindness and humility.

Well, meekness or being poor in spirit is a lot like humility.

And peacemakers and those who hunger for righteousness are also about justice.

And what are the merciful and the pure in heart if not kind?

So the lists are similar.

Following God as far back as the Old Testament is about SIMPLICITY.

And following Jesus - - centuries later - - is very similar.

So to answer my initial question...

Is there anything simple - - about being a follower of Jesus?

Yes - - being a follower means - - being simple.

Living the simple life.

It's the opposite of being ostentatious or fancy or extravagant.

At least it is - - according to Micah and Matthew - - in the Bible.

So being a follower is SIMPLE.

But it is also - - amazingly difficult.

And if you don't agree with my second - opposite claim - again, please hold on...

To understand the difficult part more fully - - consider a contrast I see here.

I think there is a contrast between these two readings.

Micah is more about DOING.

Matthew is more about BEING.

The text from Matthew says, "Blessed ARE the..." and then describes TYPES of people. / Matthew does NOT say, "BE meek". / Instead Matthew says, "blessed ARE THE meek." / Matthew is descriptive. / Matthew describes KINDS of people.

Matthew is more about BEING - - or STATES of BEING.

Micah on the other hand - - is a list of VERBS.

DO, LOVE, and WALK.

These are commands.

Micah does NOT say, blessed are the just.

Micah commands: DO justice.

So Micah is more about DOING and Matthew is about BEING.

Does that make sense?

Well - - what is difficult - - about being a follower - - is DOING.

And the SIMPLICITY - - comes in the BEING.

Simply BE - - but no matter who difficult DO.

That might be one way to describe the life of a follower of Jesus:

Simply BE - - but no matter how difficult DO.

It kind of sounds like something Yoda would say to Luke in Star Wars.

“Simply be - - but no matter how difficult DO”

Another way to put it might be: DO - - WHO you ARE.

What would it really mean for our lives - - for us to DO who we ARE?

As I was thinking about this, it occurred to me that there IS a way - - to make the difficult part - - less difficult. / The WAY - - is community.

You take ONE meek person alone - - standing up against powerful violence and it is not usually a very pretty picture. / Or ONE peacemaker - - against a whole army.

One merciful soul - - against a vengeful organization.

BUT - - if you put all the meek people together - - or combine all the peacemakers - - or put the pure in heart - - along side the merciful - - and the righteous...

There is strength in numbers.

And for a VIVID visual illustration...

Consider this lone string - - trying to stand up.

Not so good!

BUT - - look what happens when we put them together!!

The meek, and the merciful, AND the pure in heart... together...

NOW - - SIMPLE - - ALSO becomes STRONG!

And NOW - - what was DIFFICULT - - maybe is not so difficult.

In order to apply these ideas to - - a specific LIFE story - - I want to turn to a seemingly UNLIKELY place: the early life story of Fidel Castro.

You might NOT think Fidel Castro could inspire faithful living.

But it is amazing what a person learns - - when a person listens.

When a person lets go of pre-conceptions - - and tries to be open .

So let's try...

This account comes from INTERVIEWS - - between a Catholic Priest - - and Fidel Castro. / It is the amazing story of Fidel's baptism.

Fidel Castro was raised by a Roman Catholic mother and grandmother.

In the interviews, Fidel described growing up in a Catholic family, with a SAINT for each day of the week. / The saint for his birthday - - on April 24 - - was SAINT FIDELIS - - after whom he was named. / Fidelis lived in Germany in the 1500s and his name means "faithfulness" of "fidelity" in Latin.

At this point in the interview, Fidel Castro said in the interview, "So you see - - there was ANOTHER "Saint" before ME - - who was named Fidel!

Castro is not known for his humility.

However - - there is MORE to the story...

Another version of the story says that - - Fidel Castro was ACTUALLY named for a WEALTHY land owner - - who was supposed to have been his Godfather. Godfathers were important in that time and culture - - taking care of you if anything happened to your parents - - which was more common then and there. / And this LANDOWNER Fidel - - would have taken GOOD care of Fidel Castro - - because of his extreme WEALTH and POWER.

So was Fidel named after a faithful, monk who was known as the "poor man's lawyer" and died a martyr for his faith?

Or was he named after a wealthy extravagant land owner?

The answer is probably - - YES to both.

The question is - - who would HE - - - BE?

Well, the story goes ON...

The wealthy man Fidel was also a BANKER - - and very busy.

So 5 years went by and the family could never arrange for him to make it out to the country to the farm where Fidel Castro lived - - at the same time as the occasional visiting priest was also in town. / And while Fidel Castro remained UNBAPTIZED he was TAUNTED by other children. / Baptized children - - taunted him - - saying "You're a Jew".

Eventually a teacher convinced the family to let Fidel move into town to study.

But in the city - - Fidel was confronted with poverty and hunger.

The city was filled with people who were poor in spirit.

And when Fidel WAS finally baptized - - it was amid the poverty and struggles of the city - - not his comfortable boyhood farm. / AND his GODFATHER - - turned out to be the Hatian consul who was married to the teachers sister.

So his godfather turned out to be the consul to the POOREST country in the Caribbean - - RATHER THAN that millionaire friend of the family - - from whom he ended up getting ONLY - - his name.

Would his Roman Catholic grandmother ever have imagined - - that he would turn out to be - - the president of Cuba - - and that he would found an atheistic communist party!? / And that in the minds of at least SOME people - - that communist party would be committed to the rights of poor people?

If things had gone differently in his life - - who knows how it would have turned out. / Would Fidel have renounced his faith - - under different circumstances?

Fidel Castro was excommunicated by the Pope in the early 1990s.

BUT then - - he MET with both Pope Benedict AND Pope Francis.

And you might even say that some of the things Fidel DID - - supported the simple life that defines a follower of Jesus. / He just did not define himself that way.

For Fidel - - maybe - - it was simpler to DO that things described by Micah - - than it was to BE a person of faith - - as the core of his identity.

What does it really mean - - to DO - - WHO you ARE? What is following about?

Micah says, do justice, love kindness, walk humbly...

And Matthew says, blessed ARE the:

meek, the pure in heart, and those who hunger for righteousness....