

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany - February 1, 2026

- Micah 6:1-8 - Psalm 15 - 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 - Matthew 5:1-12

“What does God require of us?”

1. I hear this question in some way or another probably once a week. “So much is happening... I don’t know what to do!”
 - a. It is a question I have gotten for years, actually, it’s just that now feels like I hear it a lot more
 - b. People of faith who are touched deeply about a problem in the community, or stressed by wars abroad, or attempting to respond to a friend’s unending moment of grief.
 - c. People with big hearts who know they have limited resources and influence, but feel like they want to do their part, but it just feels like an overwhelming task.
 - d. And, frankly, I get the question and the sense of powerlessness. What can one person do? What can one whole congregation do?
 - e. Well, I suppose we can take a lesson from a group of Buddhist monks who were asking the same question and they decided to do something about it. Go on a walk. 2,300 miles from their monastery in Fort Worth Texas to Washington DC.
 - i. It’s a walk for peace. You may have seen it on social media.
 - ii. But what does a walk do? They are doing it to raise awareness of “peace, loving kindness and compassion” in the US and the world.
 - iii. The walk is to make us focus on it, to encourage us to feel and act in that way.
 - iv. And their journey has not been easy. Buddhist monk Phra Ajarn Maha Dam Phommasan was hit by a truck as they walked, and doctor saved his life but couldn’t save his leg. Still, he recovered and said that “he was not angry and expressed forgiveness and compassion toward the person who hit him.”
 - v. The monks also are walking with a dog that was a stray in India, who joined some of the same monks in a walk for peace there, and he has stayed with them.
 - vi. His name in Sanskrit is Aloka, which means light, a concept they connect with peace. Aloka has been their faithful companion but the walk has been a bit much for him, and he had to have knee surgery. But he is still with them, riding in the support vehicle.

- vii. Since the monk's accident the monks now have local police forces escort them through their jurisdiction. Officers gift the head monk with a pin from their department as a sign of hospitality and support
2. The passages for today lay out the answer for the question of what we can do, they spell it out, in fact.
- a. The Prophet writes: Seek Justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with God.
 - b. Jesus preaches on the sermon on the mount: In a world which is oppressive, full of grief, where arrogance rules, be a person of God's Reign: the person who embraces those who suffer, be the one who hungers for justice, who is merciful, seeking a clean heart, working always for peace even when the powerful feel threatened and fight back.
 - c. Sure, Micah. Yeah, Jesus. But what can I ****DO**** ?
 - d. I wonder about the disciples who first heard this sermon by Jesus
 - i. Many were actually those who were beaten down and who suffered
 - ii. Many wanted God's gracious way and not Rome's oppressive way
 - iii. And they began to recognize the counter cultural perspective Jesus was laying out
 - iv. Jesus and the prophet Micah are not asking for something that is passive or weak, but rather quite active and courageous
 - v. Try it. In fact, I know you have. Speak peace and justice to someone who embraces racism at the Thanksgiving dinner table, for example.
 - vi. I grant you that it's hard staying peaceful, staying centered engaged.
 - vii. It may be tempting to use the weapons of hate to put down hate, but MLK was right: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that," (1963 *Strength to Love*)
 - e. Jesus and Micah realized what the heavy lift would be to act in this way. That's for sure. But there is an element which may be helpful for us to consider, to at the very least change the question.
 - i. Instead of asking "what can I do?" we need to realize the actual question is more this: "what can WE do?"
 - ii. In the beatitudes Jesus is using the "you" plural ("Blessed are y'all")
 - iii. Micah means the plural not the individual when writing "O my people" and "O Mortal One"
 - iv. Consider it that way, and it changes the perspective to think of this as a journey for all of us to walk together, like the venerable monks
 - v. Because, after all, the life of faith is not an individual challenge of self improvement, like diet and exercise to lose a few pounds.

- vi. The life of faith is a human family effort, something we can only take on together.
3. In practical terms, then, maybe one way to ponder this is to think about a buddy system, harkening back to childhood camping trips or school outings – you can only go exploring if you’re not going alone
 - a. So think about who you will invite to go with you as you both live out your faith with courage and grace
 - b. Maybe you already have a buddy for when you both serve at Hot Meals, or join in community protests, or participate in church support groups
 - c. Tell someone, a new faith buddy:
 - i. You’re not alone in this. I stand with you
 - ii. You’re carrying a heavy burden. I am here to pick up the slack
 - iii. I need a partner in tackling this injustice – help!
 - iv. I know how creative you are – be part of a new way to live out faith!
4. Seek Justice in partnership. Love kindness in community. Walk humbly with God in harmony.

Reflection questions

1. Share a time when you saw a small group of people make a positive impact in a whole community.
2. How does it change your perspective to read Micah 6:1-8 and Matthew 5:1-12 and know it’s meant not for “individual” believers but ALL of us together?
3. What could be one action to which you can invite someone to join you so you “do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with God?”

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jan/17/buddhist-monks-walk-for-peace>

<https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/religion/2025/12/03/537671/buddhist-monks-leg-amputated-after-he-was-hit-by-a-car-on-walk-for-peace/>

<https://www.facebook.com/estan247/photos/a-buddhist-monk-named-phra-ajarn-maha-dam-phommasan-faced-a-life-changing-moment/1428342298669617/>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-matthew-51-12-11>