

We've been told, O fellow mortals 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? My, oh my ... How our Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda, church reformed, always reforming,' souls should sing when we realise that this profound truth in Micah ends with a question mark. Is that it - the text doesn't tell us/ it asks us. We've been told, O' fellow mortals what is good ... And/so. Discuss, discern, debate, decide? What does the Lord require of you – justice, kindness, humility? What do they mean when they're walking around impacting the creation and communities God loves – the same ones we inhabit and impact?

As the Church of Scotland assembles to discern what we are put here to do, how to, in these days, live and breathe and be part of the body of Christ, how we reform and renew and resurrect ... how we 'remember who we are' ... re-member him – the love, the life, the lessons .. the feeding, the healing, the forgiving, the question resonates ... what does doing justice, loving kindness, walking humbly mean for us?

Do justice – hmm, do ... not think about it, talk about it, theorise what that might look like or who else is responsible?

Do justice ... examples of when I've seen this.

CofS – many food banks, warm hubs, community cafes; The Big Hoose project in Fife, an initiative that partners with Amazon and others to redistribute merchandise that would go to landfill (perfectly good merchandise that is cheaper to bin than recycle) AND the Big Hoose does something about it ... doing justice means addressing issues that harm or hinder or hide people away. Doing justice finds ways to help what hurts. Doing justice thinks and acts outside the box.

And more than that - it also means demanding justice from those who might withhold it, calling for government to put the most vulnerable first, for businesses to pay fairly ... but it

sure helps if those calling for it have been brave enough to put their money, time, and imaginations where their morals are.

Doing justice also calls us, sometimes, to repent – to turn around, to go in a different direction. In April, the CofS went on an ecumenical pilgrimage with the SEC, the URC and CA. We went to Jamaica to learn from the Churches Reparation Action Forum ... to explore how we might participate honestly and relevantly to repairing the relations and realities impacted by slavery. The impacts are not a far-distant, nothing-to-do with-us history. People struggle every day with the shadow racism casts, with what entrenched colonial models impose – we have work to do.

I don't know my name.

Education ...

How we tell our stories ...

Love kindness, sounds nice. I looked up a modern definition for kindness -behavior marked by acts of generosity, consideration, and concern for others, without expecting praise or reward in return.

As I said, I like kindness. I think kindness is underrated; but, in the original text, the phrase is not kindness, it is very specific - covenant loyalty: a call to mirror the unfailing love, kindness, mercy manifested by God – to reflect love, kindness, mercy back in their relationship with the world.

When we were in Rome in November, we spent time with the Waldensians, a very small denomination of about 20,000 members: they have a strong focus on social justice and community cohesion. In Italy there is a tax, the 'otto per mille' (8 x 1000) fund which is a contribution passed over from general taxation to the taxed person's chosen charity. The

Waldensian church chooses to spend the money it receives through this scheme on social projects. With 20,000 members, last year 600,000 people chose to give their money to the Waldensians. This amounts to €42 million, involving over 1000 grants annually. They have chosen not to spend any of that money on their own internal workings and every year they publish where the money has gone and where it will go. People respond to the work they do – for others. People are inspired by the embodiment of love – for others. The Waldensians do justice. They are consistently loyal to the covenant, mirroring the image of God. They consistently ask themselves what that looks like when it is walking around, impacting creation and communities.

Walking humbly? How? Possibly by moving over, ceding the space. We define humility as a freedom from pride or arrogance ... An understanding that you don't know it all, that someone else may have something to offer than will make your understanding deeper and more whole. I was honoured to host a dinner with other women leaders across Scotland, and during the conversation, one particular comment stuck fast ...

'If you are not at the table, you are on the menu.' That calls us to collaborate, to ensure that voices, especially the voices at most risk of being silenced or excluded or ignored, are at the table, not on the menu. As the Church of Scotland assembles to discern what we are put here to do, how to, in these days, live and breathe and be part of the body of Christ, how we reform and renew and resurrect, we need to walk humbly – to ensure that the voices of those most at risk of being on the menu are at the table. Or we risk sleepwalking into irrelevance. Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly ... where might that lead?

Our New Testament parable - that short, succinct pointed story in the gospel of Matthew has subversive meaning hidden in its ancient roots.

You don't plant a mustard seed in your carefully cultivated crop because it will wreak havoc! Mustard plants were/are notoriously prolific – they germinate almost as soon as that tiny seed falls, and they take over, intrude, mix with other plants and eradicate them. It teaches in the Mishnah that the mustard seed shouldn't be planted in a garden but only in a place where it can be kept away from other plants. And Jesus tells a story about the kingdom of heaven being like someone who took a mustard seed and intentionally planted it in his field ... and it did what it was created to do - it took over and completely altered their landscape!

It begs the question ... Is that what we are called to – a love for the world that takes over/plants itself firmly in our garden, in our space, in our lives and changes everything? Is that the kind of faith we are called to when we see and hear our brothers and sisters crying out? Are we willing to let our faith plant itself like a mustard seed, uprooting things, moving and mixing and taking over our carefully cultivated space? If we are the body of Christ, could this be his plan – to keep on coming, bursting into our lives with an in your face “Here I am” what are you going to do about it? Or slipping in so quietly that we don't even notice him until he taps us on the shoulder and gives us that shy uncertain smile. Is that Christ's plan all along - to inject himself into everyone and everything, to keep showing himself to those who want to follow?

As the Church of Scotland assembles, to discern what we are put here to do, how to, in these days, live and breathe and be part of the body of Christ, how we reform and renew and resurrect ... how we 'remember who we are', what does doing justice, loving kindness, walking humbly mean for us? What will it look like, walking around in us, impacting and the creation and communities God loves – the same ones we inhabit and impact? Question Mark.

