

Grace to you and peace in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a delight to bring you greetings on behalf of your sisters and brothers in Christ from coast, to coast, to coast across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Thank you for choosing to participate in the ELCIC Praise Appeal and for your support of the work of the wider church. The theme for this year's Praise Appeal is ***Do Justice, Love Kindness, and Walk Humbly with Your God*** which comes from Micah 6:8.

The passage outlines what God requires us to do in a way that is both memorable and compelling. I remember the first time I really "heard" this passage as a teenager. It was a wonderful revelation that seemed to encapsulate how I felt I was being called to live out my life as a disciple of Jesus. I have felt the same way when I hear the great commandment from Jesus in Mark's Gospel, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. Direct, to the point, clear instructions as to how to live out our discipleship. So how come it sounds easier than it actually is to carry out?

The larger passage where our lesson from Micah comes from is laid out as a lawsuit against God's people as conducted by the prophet. It calls on the mountains and the hills of evidence. It recounts God's faithfulness to the people of Israel and their repeated faithlessness in carrying out their part of the covenant made between God and God's people.

I think, if we are honest, we have to admit we have a lot in common with the people of Israel. All of us strug-

gle to fight against our sinful nature, to fight against the temptation that surrounds us in our consumerist culture to put ourselves first. I think all of us long for a close relationship with our loving God. I think all of us know that we could do much better in living out our sides of that close relationship as committed disciples of Jesus in our world. That is why I have called the church into spiritual renewal, so that as we pray, read, worship, study, serve, give and tell we might live out daily lives that look a lot more like the ones that God requires of us.

Let's look a little closer at what this might mean.

Doing justice isn't just about not being a lawbreaker. Doing justice means working against all the places where there is injustice in our world. It means speaking up when others use language that is racist or sexist or negative towards anyone's basic human dignity. It means being willing to give up some of the blessings we have to share with those who are in need. It means being like the persistent widow and call our governments and legal systems into account for serving all people justly and equitably. Doing justice is often not a popular stance to take in our acquiescent world. Doing justice takes conviction and courage. But that is what God calls us to do.

Loving kindness is more than just being nice. Loving kindness means living day to day in right relationships with those around us. Loving kindness means selfless acts of paying it forward to spread God's love into surprising corners of our homes, communities and world. Loving kindness is a willingness to monitor our thoughts, desires and actions and take seriously what

it means to love our neighbours as ourselves. And sometimes the hardest part of that equation is the loving ourselves.

Walking humbly with our God is more than a movie shot of you and God going off into the sunset together. Walking humbly with God means that you let God be first. You follow God's way, not insist on your own way. Walking humbly with God can take you into some challenging places. Walking humbly with God means facing up to your losses and sorrows and disappointments and sharing your pain openly with God. Walking humbly with God can transform your life into one of purpose and meaning if you let it.

It is not just we as individuals who are called to ***Do Justice, Love Kindness and Walk Humbly with Our God.*** Our national church, our synods, our congregations and specialized ministries are also called to do these things. The ELCIC is trying to do these things through its current strategic plan with its four goals: *In Mission for Others*, we will practice Spirited Discipleship, nurture a Healthy Church, practice Compassionate Justice, and practice Effective Partnerships.

Through your gift to the Praise Appeal you help us **Do Justice**, through our partnerships KAIROS and the Anglican Church of Canada as we work in the areas of homeless and affordable housing and responsible resource extraction, among many other important issues. You help us **Love Kindness** as we work to support refugees around the world, and work in many development and relief programs with our partners in the Lutheran World Federation and Canadian Lutheran World Relief.

You help us **Love Kindness** as we support ministry in indigenous communities in Argentina and Peru with our partner churches. You help us **Walk Humbly with Our God** as we continue the Call to Spiritual Renewal, working to deepen the discipleship of all of our members and learning new ways to reach out in faith to those around us. You help us **Walk Humbly with Our God** as we work to build better relationships with other denominations and faiths here in Canada, through the Canadian Council of Churches, and around the world through the World Council of Churches. Your financial support of the National Church through the Praise Appeal helps us to accomplish all these things and more.

I am excited for the future of our church, and I hope that you are too! Despite the many challenges we face, we know that in the end it is God's church! We do not know for sure how things are going to turn out but we know that with God they will be good. As faithful people committed to doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with our God, we know that with God we will be blessed and that with God's help we will be a blessing to others.

Thank you for your commitment to deepening your discipleship and being spiritually renewed as you ***Do Justice, Love Kindness and Walk Humbly with Our God.*** Thank you for your support of our collective work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Thank you for your support and participation in this Praise Appeal. May God bless and strengthen your ministry both individually and together.