

## **Walking with God**

**Micah 6:6-8**

**March 3, 2024**

Yesterday I finally put away the last of the Christmas decorations.

Yes, I know that's ridiculous – it's almost Easter.

My excuse is that our church's mission trip to India departed on Dec. 27<sup>th</sup> at 6 a.m.,

so during that week between Christmas and New Year's when most folks tidy up,

I was on the other side of the world.

I have to say, this excuse sounded way more plausible in my head than it does when said out loud –

I have been back home for almost two months.

Well, anyway.

Yesterday the remaining angels and nutcrackers and Santas went back to their cold dark corner of the attic.

And the very last thing I did was to sit down with the basket of Christmas cards we'd received, and look through them one last time.

Along with all the photos that made me smile,

and newsy notes from cousins far away,

was a card from an old friend long since moved away –

Susan Cooper, the wonderful children's author,

who had lived just down Bronson with her charming actor husband Hume Cronyn.

Just to see her name, and to read her sweet note,

brought back memories of what we had shared together for years: morning walks.

Susan and I would meet at the end of her driveway,

and head south, down to Hulls Farm and up Morehouse Highway –

north of Hulls Farm, Morehouse became a tiny wandering lane

which Susan loved, it reminded her, she said, of the England of her childhood.

We'd stroll the roads around Jennie Lane,  
end up on Merwins,

and eventually find the steeple of Greenfield Hill again.

Always the same route – we weren't much for adventuring,

it was the conversation we loved,

the easy conversation that you fall into when you're walking alongside someone.

Isn't it funny how much easier it is to talk with someone  
when you're walking together,

how much easier it is to say what you're thinking,

what makes you laugh and what makes you worry,

as the road passes under your feet and the miles go by.

We'd talk about everything –

families and faith and politics and how to keep the deer from eating our gardens.

After she moved away, I joined the gym at the Parks and Rec,

and I found it a nice place to be – still do –

but not the same as a companionable walk.

The guy on the elliptical next to me was definitely not as interested  
in hearing about what my kids were up to.

No, definitely not the same as a walk with Susan.

What Laraine read to you from scripture just a moment ago

was an invitation to a walk with a friend, as it were.

Laraine shared the words of the prophet Micah

in which he reminded his people of what God wants most from us.

All God really wants, the passage says,

is for you to do justice and to love kindness,

and to walk with God.

Walk with God.

It's a wonderful image.

Walking with God means all the same things as a walk with a friend:  
to match your steps together and to fall into easy companionship as you  
walk along the way,

Walking with God, as with a friend,

means to open your heart and your life to the other,

and to find yourself in the company of someone who *wants* to hear all that's  
happening.

Walking with God is walking with a friend, what a friend –  
one who laughs with you and weeps with you, too ...

Walking with God means all of this.

And if the ground is suddenly unsteady,

walking with God means a hand to hold ...

and when you fall behind, it means one who will wait for you.

My parents are tremendous walkers;

you know how old I am – old –

so you know they're older than that –

and they would still rather walk the mile and a half to the Charlottesville  
Kroger than hop in the car.

Next month, in fact, they're off to England

for a week of walking in the southwest peninsula.

It will undoubtedly rain on them. They will not be bothered.

It will likely be quite chilly. That, too, will not bother them.

I know this firsthand because some 23 years ago,

my parents persuaded me, my brother Andy, and my sister Penny  
to join them on a walk,

a one hundred mile walk through the Scottish highlands  
on what is known as the West Highland Way.

To be clear, this walk was not the least bit daunting to them – they had already walked the Coast to Coast walk across England, whose name describes it accurately.

But knowing that we, their children, were not in as good a shape as they, they chose this easy walk:

just a stroll through the highland mountains.

“Don’t worry,” my mother promised, “thousands of people do this walk every year – you’ll find it quite manageable.”

So off we went, the five of us, my nuclear family reconvened.

And the walk was extraordinary:

breathtakingly beautiful trails around Loch Lomond,

mountains rising majestically around us, still snow-capped in April;

the warmth of a Scottish pub at the end of long day,

the welcome of a bed and breakfast along the path.

It was indeed, true to my parents’ promise, manageable even for this out-of-shape daughter of theirs.

Until the last day.

We were 14 miles from the end of the walk,

14 miles from the town of Fort William,

100 miles directly due north of Glasgow,

where we were due to catch a train and head back south.

We awoke that day to the sound of pouring rain,

and a weather report on the radio warning ominously of gale-force winds, relentless rain, and temperatures not to rise above 5 degrees Celsius.

My siblings and I assumed that we would obviously not be walking on such a day.

We assumed incorrectly.

My parents started cheerfully putting on their rain gear,

and my brother and sister and I immediately regressed to the age of 10, and began whining “we don’t *want* to walk in the rain!”

“We have a train to catch,” my parents pointed out,  
which was true.

So out the door we went and up the path,  
which that day followed an ancient military road made of rough stone,  
through open fields, with constant rain and the wind whipping.

For a long while I slogged alone, head down, feeling sorry for myself,  
and then my brother came alongside and fell into step with me.

As soggy and cold as I was, he was in worse shape – he’d brought jeans  
rather than waterproof pants,

and they were soaked through with what was close to ice water.

My sister saw that we were moving slowly,

and she hung back to keep us company,

and then my parents, too.

And in the midst of the icy rain my dad said something funny,

and in spite of ourselves we all started cracking up,

and that’s how we made our way to Fort William ...

five drowned rats with backpacks,

coaxing each other along, step by step,

fourteen incredibly long, slow, miserable miles that I most certainly would  
not have finished

if not for the companionship on the way of those who loved me.

The picture of the five of us at the Fort William train station hangs on a wall  
of the Parsonage –

so wet, so cold – and grinning with relief.

Walking with God is not in frequently like that too.

Sometimes, yes, it’s the companionable stroll of friend with friend,  
talking earnestly together, listening and being listened to.

But sometimes it’s the hard hard journey

together with someone who will make sure you get down the path,  
the right path,

who will walk you through the driving rain and the terrible cold

and maybe even remind you how to laugh along the way.

My family did that for me.

God does that for us whenever we need God to.

Whenever we need God to.

We are invited, each one of us,  
to look at our lives as a walk with God.

We don't have to invite God to walk beside us,  
because in truth God already is right there alongside each one of us.

What we're invited to is trust in God's companionship.

What we're invited into is conversation with the one who walks beside us,  
sharing our needs and our hopes and our laughter,  
opening our hearts to this friend who is listening.

One of my favorite stories from the Gospels  
is of the two friends walking to the town of Emmaus from Jerusalem  
after the Resurrection.

And they're joined on the way by a mysterious stranger  
to whom they find themselves confiding everything,  
and who gives them words of hope and reassurance.  
It's Jesus, of course – and they finally realize it,  
the one says to the other “we should have known –  
were not our hearts burning within us as he spoke to us?”

That's how it can be for each one of us  
as we open our eyes to see the One who walks beside us,  
warming our hearts and lifting our spirits,  
carrying us, even, when the path is more than we can navigate ourselves.

That's how it can be for each one of us  
when we realize whose company we are walking in,  
who it is whose matching their steps with ours.  
“What does God ask of you,” says the prophet Micah,  
“but to walk with God.”

To walk this life, that is, with our eyes open to God's presence on the way.

This week, at the recommendation of several of you,  
I've been reading the book that's just come out written by Savannah Guthrie,  
of NBC news and Today Show fame.

She's titled it *"Mostly What God Does: Reflections on Seeking and Finding His Love Everywhere."*

In a recent interview,

Guthrie said, "I didn't go to seminary. I'm not a theologian.

But what I am is a fellow traveler.

I'm just another person trying to walk this journey,  
sharing my stories with others to put context to this walk with God."

And that's what she does.

She tells her story, not as a standard memoir,  
but told as the story of her walk with God –  
from her earliest memories of praying to God,  
through the loss of her father, and her need for God's strength.

There's much to love in this book.

I'll just give you one glimpse,

from her description of a time of great struggle:

*"There are times," she writes, "when you will fall right down to the bottom.*

*You will be banged up, scratched, and a little bloody.*

*And what you do next will determine everything.*

*You'll climb. You'll stick with it because you are not climbing alone.*

*God is with you, and God is for you.*

*In fact, he is ready to carry you if you'll let him."*

This is what we hope you find here, David and I,  
what we hope you find in this church,  
what you remember here.

That there is no reason, no reason ever, to think that you walk alone.

That beside you is the listening friend who hears and laughs and comforts and cajoles,  
the best walking companion you could have.

The One who will not only encourage you when the way is rough, but hold you up and hold you close.

What does the Lord require of you, says Micah, but to do this: to do justice, to love kindness .... and to *walk with your God*.

Amen.