

Sermon for 1 February 2026 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Scriptures: Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15 (Page 747); 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5 :1-12

Sermon : This lectionary cycle seems determined to give us as much as possible of the Jesus story to reflect on as the year goes by. Starting with the 4-week season of Advent, it gave us a full taste of anticipation to look back on any time all year when we find ourselves waiting, expecting, scared and hopeful, as God always wants us to learn how to be. Then Christmas and the literal birth of Jesus, a new start and all that signifies; then our present season of Epiphany, when the world's wisest ones scoured the world as far as they could for evidence that a lasting change had come over things, permanently... which is what we're in until the middle of February with our texts for Epiphany.

So for today, we start with the tender harshness of the prophet Micah and his insistence that the point of everything is not to be rich, or powerful, or even brave, but..... repeat these closing words: "He has told thee, O mortal ...**and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, And to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?**" Whatever happens, you will know how to act, and it will be simple and basic and guided by insight that you know is more than just creaturely, just human.

Next, a psalm I found marked in my **Dad's** personal Bible as his favorite. Psalm 15. It's short and simple enough to repeat with me now. **Those who do these things will never be moved.** As a family doctor, think of how on target that was. (*Tell the story one of his patient's told me about him, ending with, "Your Dad could make me madder than anyone I ever knew, but I still think he was the best doctor in town."*) Guidelines.

Then, as often happens, we're reading from a particular New Testament book for an extended period, and this time, this year, we've got a letter to an early church, written by, the Apostle Paul ... "**not many of you are of noble birth. But God chose what was foolish in the world to shame the wise.**" He was dealing with an argument, a division, and he wasn't afraid to end with, what? How does he put it? Read it with me. The last sentence. "**Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.**"

But of course, we almost always finish with Jesus; and today he went up the mountainWhat do you remember about this? Tell one another (Take time here.... to hear and share).....

Let us pray. Lord God, school us in your wisdom. Lead us day by day into more awareness that we do have something to say, courage comes to us ... we can be still and know ... We are guided, more and more, year by year, long after we first listened. Our whole time is desperate ... and look, there comes a word that rings true; yonder comes a kid, maybe in daycare, or a grandfather, with the right look or word .. We are wise... or the young one is. This is holy, God, this time we're spending together, and we're here to savor it and to say a kind word of thanks for the one who spoke it.

We are yours. Bring us close, to Thee and to the world you hold so dear...precious Lord...

Amen.