

## **Act. Love. Walk.**

LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church

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Micah 6:1-8

I want to start this morning by thinking about ballroom dancing. I don't know if you girls have ever seen really good ballroom dancing. It's usually the kind of dancing you associate with older people, but I do know that the show *Dancing with The Stars* has exposed younger people to this kind of dancing, too.

Ballroom dancing is dancing done in pairs. A man and a woman are partners and they move around the dancefloor to the music. In traditional ballroom dancing certain dances are classics. The waltz, the tango, the foxtrot. And for each of these dances there are specific steps that the dancers must learn. The waltz for example. If you are dancing a waltz the music is always in three. Ohm pah pah. Ohm pah pah. That's the beat of a waltz. And following the beat of the music, there are three basic waltz steps. You go forward with your left, you slide with your right and step with your left. Then you go back with your right, slide with your left and come together with your right. So the music goes one two three and your steps go one two three.

But not only do your steps have to be in time with the music, they have to be in time with your partner. You stand like this face to face, and one of the partners takes the lead; they start the steps and the turns. They guide the dance. So when the person who leads starts to slide their foot forward, their partner's foot has to move at the same time, in the same direction. And when the person who leads slides, the other person has to slide at the same time and in the same direction. The partners have to move together. If they don't move together, the dance will not be a waltz, it will be a mess. The dancers will step on each other's feet, they will bump heads, they will bump knees, it will look like wrestling, not dancing. But when the dancers move in synch, when all their movements are together and in time with the music, it's beautiful to watch. The dancers sweep over the dancefloor like they're walking on air and the music carried them along. When dancing is done right, it is good and it is beautiful.

Why am I talking about waltzes? This isn't dancing class, this is church. What does any of this have to do with Micah 6 and your theme verse. Here's what it has to do with Micah: in this passage, you could say that God is asking his people to dance. In this passage God is holding out his hand to his people and he's inviting them to dance with him. God wants a relationship with us. He wants to dance through life with us. In this passage he's holding his hand out and saying, c'mon my people. Take my hand and dance with me. It will be good and beautiful.

Actually it's an unusual dance request. Normally when someone asks you to dance, that person is smiling and in a good mood. But God's a little frustrated here. He's frustrated because he's been asking the people of Judah to dance for years, and they have either rejected him, or when they do agree to dance, they don't follow his lead, they don't follow his steps. They want to do things their own way. You can hear God's frustration at the beginning of the passage. But God's love is persistent and he's holding his hand out again, saying, 'C'mon! Let's dance!'

But God does more than that. In your theme verse, God doesn't just invite the people to dance, he teaches them how to do his dance. You could think of Micah 6:8 as dance instructions. First he tells them how not to dance. I don't want you to keep giving me more and more sacrifices. Sacrifices are fine but I don't need ten thousand rivers of oil and a million sheep. My dance has more to do with relationships: how you treat your neighbors and how you live with me. You want to know the steps of my dance! Here they are. Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God." Notice, that just like the waltz there are three steps to God's dance. Act Justly. Love Mercy. Walk Humbly with your God. If we learn those steps, we will find ourselves in rhythm with God, moving with him around the dance floor of life with joy. If we ignore those steps we will find ourselves bumping into God, wrestling with him and banging heads with him, and it will not be pretty.

Of course it's not just those people of long ago whom God is asking to dance. When we read this passage today, God is holding out his hand to us, inviting us on the dance floor, inviting us to learn the rhythm of this dance. So let's have some dance lessons. I want to spend a moment reflecting on each of these three

steps and I want to do that by looking at women in the Bible who danced these steps well. Women who did justice, who loved mercy and walked humbly with their God.

In the first step of the dance God calls us to act justly. What does that mean. What is this step about? Well, when you act justly, you are concerned about fairness. You want to make sure that everyone plays fair. So when you act justly, you don't treat a popular person in your class differently from an unpopular person, and you don't treat a beautiful attractive person differently from someone who is plain. When you act justly, you don't treat a rich person differently than a poor person. Everyone gets the same kindness, the same attention the same concern from you. Also, when you act justly, you pay special care for the people who are being treated unfairly, which is often people who are weak or small. When someone who is weak is treated badly, you speak out. You say something.

When I think of someone who acted justly in the Bible, I think of Esther. Esther was one of God's people. She was a Jew, but she was also a Queen. She was married to the powerful Persian emperor Xerxes. Because she was a queen, she had a very comfortable life. Lots of beautiful things, lots of fancy clothes, and a beautiful palace to live in. But Esther knew that in the Kingdom of Persia there was injustice. Her fellow Jews were not being treated fairly. A man named Haman hated the Jews and he wanted them all dead, so he wrote an order that all the Jews be killed. Esther knew this was not fair, so she decided to speak out. That was dangerous for her. She knew Haman and other powerful people would be mad at her. She could lose her position as queen and all her nice things. She could even be killed. But that didn't stop Esther. She went to the king and said, 'this rule is not fair! Haman is doing a wicked thing! Haman is doing an unjust thing!' And it worked. The King listened and the Jews were saved. Esther knew the first step of the dance. And when she danced in God's rhythm, when she moved with God's step, it was good and it was beautiful.

In the second step of the dance, God calls us to love mercy. What does it mean to love mercy? The word for mercy here is a famous Hebrew word. It's the word Hesed. Hesed is translated lots of different ways in the Bible. Sometimes it's translated as kindness. Sometimes it's translated as love. Sometimes it's translated as steadfast love. Sometimes it's translated as mercy. What is this hesed? Well we can learn this dance step by watching God dance it, because in the Old Testament, there are lots and lots and lots of times where God's love for us is described as hesed. God's hesed is a love that doesn't give up. It keeps loving over a long period of time, even when the person you love is difficult. And God's Hesed always loves extra. Hesed loves people more than they expect and more than they deserve. Hesed doesn't say, "You only loved me 5, so I'm only going to love you 5; hesed says, you loved me 5 but I'm still going to love you 1000!" So when God shows hesed, his love doesn't give up easily, and he loves us more than we expect or deserve.

When I think of someone in the Bible who danced this step well, I think of Ruth. Ruth was a foreign woman who was living in Bethlehem. Her Mother-in-law was Naomi. She married one of Naomi's sons when Naomi's family lived in Moab, but then her husband died and Naomi's husband died, so Naomi decided to move back to Bethlehem. Ruth decided to go with her. She promised to take care of Naomi. She knew that as an older woman, a widow with no husband, Naomi would need help, so Ruth became her caregiver. When she did that, Ruth was showing hesed to Naomi. Her love would not give up. She stuck with Naomi even though it meant she had to go out every day and try to find food for both of them in a strange country where people probably wouldn't like her. She loved her Mother-in-law even when she was cranky and bitter. Her love didn't give up, and it was more than Naomi could have expected. Ruth didn't need to do this; she went above and beyond. Ruth showed hesed: her love didn't give up easily, and it gave extra.

Ruth knew the second step of God's dance really well. She danced in rhythm with God and if you know the story you know that God used her to bring his Kingdom. God gave Ruth a son and she became the great grandmother of king David. She danced to God's step, and when she danced it was good and it was beautiful.

Finally, the last step of the dance. God calls us to walk humbly with him. What is this dance step about? In this dance step God is reminding us who leads in the dance. Remember I said that in real dancing, there is always someone who leads and someone who follows? In a dance between two people someone starts the steps. In a dance between two people, someone decides which way to turn as you dance. Our life is like a dance where God leads. We are dancing with him and we are working hard, but we are following his lead. He's the one who guides us, who decides the twists and turns and spins and dips and ups and downs. We hold on, we learn his steps and we trust that he knows how this dance should go. He will lead us where we need to be. So as we dance

with him we don't try to take over. Even if his dance seems to be leading us in a place that is a little bit scary for us, we trust him to lead.

When I think of someone in the Bible who knew this step of the dance and danced it well, I think of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Remember she was just a young girl, only a little older than you when the angel came to her. A lot of people think she was just 14 years old. I'm sure Mary had a lot of plans for her life. I'm sure she had an idea about where she wanted her dance to lead. She was going to marry Joseph, that nice carpenter, and he would build them a house maybe close to the Sea of Galilee and they would have some children and settle down and she would make a garden. But now the angel comes to her and says that she will be pregnant by a miracle before she was married, and that the baby would be the Messiah. What would people say?! What would Joseph say!? Would he still want to marry her? It must have been really scary. But do you remember what Mary did, even though she was scared? She said, 'I am the Lord's servant. I will do whatever he says.' It's like she said, "Lord, this is hard and I'm a little bit scared. But I trust you. You are leading this dance, and if this is where you want to go, I will follow."

Mary walked humbly with her God. She knew the third step of God's dance really well. When she danced, it was good, it was beautiful, and God used her to bring Jesus into the world.

We can say more about that little boy that Mary had, the one she humbly accepted from the angel. He was pretty special. He was God come down to earth to be a person like us. In Jesus, God walked among us as a person just like us. And what did he do when he came here? He held out his hand and asked us to dance. 'Follow me! Come to me when you are tired and worn out and I will give you rest.' He was a great dancer. He acted justly. He Loved Mercy. He walked humbly. He danced through Galilee healing people and telling stories. He danced down to Jerusalem preaching sermons and blessing people. And through his whole ministry, as he danced, Jesus held out his hand and said to people, "C'mon! Dance with me! I'll teach you to dance my Father's dance!" And what did we do? Did we dance with him? Did people follow him and learn his dance? No. We took his hand alright, but we didn't dance, we took his hand and nailed it up on the cross. And on the cross, as his last act of mercy and justice, he forgave us and he gave his life to save us.

All year long you GEMS have been studying this theme. Your leaders have been talking about acting justly and loving mercy and walking humbly with your God. They didn't talk about dancing, but they were teaching you the steps of God's dance. Through them Jesus was holding his hand out to you and saying, hey come with me; learn My Father's dance! I hope you will take his hand and dance with him, I hope you will learn his steps because when his dance becomes the dance of your life, it is good and it is beautiful.

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