

**Sunday, February 2, 2014**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon**

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I am a list maker.

I have to-do lists next to my phone in the office with the daily-weekly tasks that must be accomplished;

I have long-term lists on the notepad on my phone and then I have even longer-term notes and lists on a new app I found called Elephant Pad.

When I make a note on my Elephant Pad it records on my computer at work, my iphone and my ipad.

I am awash in notes to remind me what to do.

Of course, having the lists doesn't mean that everything gets done.

It simply means that I know what I ought to be doing.

Today's readings, all three of them, provide us with some lists delineating tasks and attitudes required, or perhaps, suggested, for a good Christian life.

The earliest reading, from Psalm 15 poses the question "Who may abide in your tent?"

God's answer to the psalmist is that "those who walk blamelessly and do what is right and speak truth from their heart."

That seems doable. I imagine that we all feel capable of attaining those goals.

Psalm 15 is not intended as a 'to do' list. Rather it speaks of how the character of God's people is shaped by the character of God.

The people are not sinless, but their lives are 'in tune' with God.

They are trying to live faithfully.

Their relationship with God is reflected in their everyday actions.

Next we hear from the prophet Micah.

Now Micah is upset with his community.

He presents his message in the form of a court case, one in which the hills and mountains have been called to serve as the jury.

The suit has been brought by God against Israel for breaking the covenant.

Israel has complained that God is responsible for all the disasters that are happening.

God's point is that if calamity comes as a result of breaking the covenant, it is not God's fault.

Through his prophet Micah he tells us clearly what is required:

to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God.

*Justice* means we work for fairness and equality for all, especially the weak and powerless.

*Loving kindness* means grace, compassion and openness to all persons.

*Walking with God* means honoring God in our hearts and putting God first in our lives.

It means living the way God wants us to live.

Again, Micah's list seems like one that we could embrace.

This is how we want to live.

Next, we come to the Beatitudes in Matthew's gospel.

Here again, we are provided not with 'prescriptions, but descriptions.'

The beatitudes are not statements about how we have to live if we want God to love us.

They are statements about how we live because God is in relationship with us.

We are being molded into lives like this by walking with God.

Along with Micah's prophecy, the Beatitudes show us the kind of life that "God blesses".

These Scriptures seek to invite us into the blessing of God which is already ours because of God's grace.

In God's kingdom, everyone is blessed!

The beauty of the Beatitudes is that they speak to each one of us.

We are included in God's remarkable promise of mercy and peace.

Each one of us, at different times in our lives, have felt poor in spirit, mournful or meek.

We have yearned for justice when it seems absent.

We have been given opportunities to be merciful or perhaps we've prayed for mercy ourselves.

We have all known people who are pure of heart, who strive for peace, just as we have known people who have been persecuted because of their beliefs.

What we hear in the beatitudes is that God's kingdom is open to all.

No matter what you have been through, there is a place for you among the children of God.

When we open ourselves to God's values and purposes, our hearts begin to change and we begin to live, automatically, the kind of life that brings blessing and justice to others and to ourselves.

God's grace enables us to live this way, but if we refuse to allow God's grace to do its work, we have chosen to separate ourselves from God's "blessings".

This past week, I made it to the bottom of my reading pile and came upon a book that I received as a gift a few years ago, *Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts* by Baptist Pastor Gary Chapman.

This book had its first printing in 1992 and subsequently had three additional releases selling over 8 million copies, translated into 36 languages.

Those statistics tell me that this book touched a nerve – addressed a communal need.

It is also presented as a sort of list – which appealed to me.

The book addresses the importance of communicating love in a way that is understood by the recipient.

It also makes a strong case for the reality that people have different ways of expressing love.

I began to think about how true this is about church.

We all love God, but we have so many different ways to show that.

Micah's followers were offering burnt animals and God said, that's not what I want.

I want justice, kindness and humility.

Jesus' followers were setting up criteria for who was acceptable in the kingdom of God and Jesus soundly rejected their ideas in his sermon on the mount.

The point of Reverend Chapman's book is that there are many ways to express love – but no one particular right way.

He argues that relationships are strengthened when we acknowledge our differences and gain a deeper understanding of one another.

The five types of love language that Chapman identifies are:

Words of Affirmation

Quality Time

Receiving Gifts

Acts of Service

Physical Touch

You can look at each one of these and see how we use them in worship and Christian life to show our love of God.

*Words of Affirmation* are certainly present in our daily prayers and worship.

*Quality Time* is the time that we set aside for prayer or worship or doing something kind for another person.

*Gift giving* happens with our offerings and pledges that support the work of the church in the wider world.

*Acts of Service* are those things that we do to help feed or clothe or shelter our neighbor.

*Physical Touch* is not something that we are able to attain with God, but touching one another – a hug, a handshake, a pat on the back – these are all acts of loving kindness that convey God's goodness and grace to another person.

How about you?

What language is most comfortable for you?

How do you show your love of God?

As you go about your lives this week, I invite you to think about what the Lord requires of you and the many ways that you have been blessed to meet those requirements.