

Sunday June 27, 2021

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer (Greg W)

Good morning and welcome to church this morning. The bible encourages us to continue to meet together to worship God and to encourage fellow believers. In Hebrews Chapter 10 we read; *"Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have made a habit, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching"*. Therefore, it is great that you are able to set aside some time to join in worshipping God today.

In the sermon today we will consider the question of how we are to deal with the disasters in our world? In Micah Chapter 7 we will see a possible response, step by step. We'll learn that it is not an easy process nor will it automatically get you to where you want to go. But if we can follow it, God will bring us through these tough times, take us to Christ and give us real hope.

Colossians 4:2 advises us to; *"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful"*, so let us now give thanks to God through prayer:

Our Father in Heaven, may your name be proclaimed to the ends of the earth, and may you be glorified as the creator of all things. May all the earth shout for joy, and worship you with gladness, for you are the one true and living God. We give you thanks and praise for you are good, and your love endures forever.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

Almighty God, you are a God who made all things, for the benefit of your glory. In the beginning you made the world around us, and made us to have a special place within your creation. "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

Lord, we live in a world where there are many distractions that draw us away from worshipping You. Thank you that even though we are disobedient you continue to love us as your children and continue to show us your mercy. We give you thanks and praise that because of your grace you have redeemed us and displayed a love to us that we cannot earn, and that is not deserved.. We give you thanks that through Christ's obedience, and His death on the cross, that the price for sin has been paid – once, for all so that what was once unclean can be made clean. Thank you Lord that through the resurrection of Christ and his defeat over death, we can be confident that those who place their faith in Jesus will also be raised to eternal life with You.

Father God, we pray that as we continue to study your word in the bible today that we will have soft, teachable hearts that yearn to learn how you would have us live as your people. In Christ's name we pray, Amen

Song – Let your Kingdom come <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Rh8l0r9glA>

Song – Jesus Christ is risen today

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwagSuw_WaA

Bible Reading – Micah 7:1-7 (NIV)

What misery is mine! I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave.² The faithful have been swept from the land; not one upright person remains. Everyone lies in wait to shed blood; they hunt each other with nets.³ Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire— they all conspire together.⁴ The best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge. The day God visits you has come, the day your watchmen sound the alarm. Now is the time of your confusion.⁵ Do not trust a neighbour; put no confidence in a friend. Even with the woman who lies in your embrace guard the words of your lips.⁶ For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— a man's enemies are the members of his own household.⁷ But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.

Kids Talk – Quizworx

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1wJz5U6UuuMRNhc0TQuoxMYMyfWSgwKV>

Song – I will wait for you https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJUqY_6tqo

Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, As we come together today in fellowship, we acknowledge that you are a majestic Lord. We praise you with all of our hearts, for you truly are great and worthy of praise. You are the king above all kings, and are to be feared above all gods. You sit on your heavenly throne and judge the world in righteousness. And we thank you that you care for every one of us, that you continue to work in our lives, renewing our hearts and help us to live righteous lives. And we thank you that you listen to, and answer our prayers.

Lord, we pray for Christians throughout the world who face persecution. We know that for many people who come to know the Lord Jesus as their saviour, that they are often dis-owned by their families and friends, that they may suffer abuse, and face continued pressure to renounce you. We think particularly of the Christians in Kazakhstan where police regularly raid their meetings, interrogating them and fining them. We pray that you will be with our fellow brothers and sisters and help them to stand firm in their faith, and that you will soften the hearts of the leaders and officials so that these Christians may have greater freedom to hear your Word and to spread your message.

We pray for those countries which are experiencing increased cases of COVID-19. We know that it is having a devastating effect on the people in these countries with increased sickness, hospitalisations and death. We pray that you will be with the leaders of these countries and give them wisdom as they seek to put measures in place to slow the spread of COVID-19, whilst also looking after the health and welfare of their citizens.

And Lord, we thank you that our country has been largely successful in limiting the spread of COVID-19. We thank you for the easing of restrictions across the country and the opening of state borders. However, we also know that the pandemic has meant that there are many people in our community who have lost work, lost their businesses, and are struggling to survive. We thank you that the government introduced measures to provide additional support for these people, but as this support is being withdrawn, we pray that you will be with those who are affected and help them to live within their means.

And we praise you Lord that our two Charlestown morning services are currently full. We thank you for Stephen and Jon as they have continued to faithfully preach your Word throughout the year, despite the restrictions that our Church has faced. We thank you that restrictions have eased which has allowed us to provide an increased Kids Church program, and we pray that you will be with the leaders of this program as they run the program parallel to our services, and help them to teach our younger members about you.

We pray that this will see more families able to come to church each week so that they may be encouraged in their faith. And we ask all of this in your Son's glorious name. Amen.

Bible Reading – Micah 6:9-16 (NIV)

⁸ Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. ⁹ Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and upholds my cause. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness. ¹⁰ Then my enemy will see it and will be covered with shame, she who said to me, "Where is the LORD your God?" My eyes will see her downfall; even now she will be trampled underfoot like mire in the streets. ¹¹ The day for building your walls will come, the day for extending your boundaries. ¹² In that day people will come to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, even from Egypt to the Euphrates and from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain. ¹³ The earth will become desolate because of its inhabitants, as the result of their deeds.

¹⁴ Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, which lives by itself in a forest, in fertile pasturelands. Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in days long ago. ¹⁵ "As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show them my wonders." ¹⁶ Nations will see and be ashamed, deprived of all their power. They will put their hands over their mouths and their ears will become deaf. ¹⁷ They will lick dust like a snake, like creatures that crawl on the ground. They will come trembling out of their dens; they will turn in fear to the LORD our God and will be afraid of you.

¹⁸ Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. ¹⁹ You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ You will be faithful to Jacob, and show love to Abraham as you pledged on oath to our ancestors in days long ago.

Sermon – All is lost – or is it?

<https://youtu.be/RovVdtUsAGQ>

Buxton couple Sharon and Steve Jackson and their family lost everything when the fires ripped through their community south of Sydney. The couple had been at a funeral for Steve's mother when they started receiving the fire alerts via their mobile. They got home at the same time as three fire trucks arrived. They let the animals out into the paddock, they got some photos and then they had to leave. And when they returned there was nothing left of their home but their memories.

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"This house has always been full of love and laughter", Sharon told A Current Affair, "and now it's gone... I have no idea what to do, I don't know where to step. I have never been through anything like this before."

Slide 3

How do you deal with a disaster like that? What on earth do you do when your world falls apart? What steps do you take to find your way forward when it seems everything is lost?

Over the last month or so we have been working our way through the book of Micah, as he and his nation of Israel are confronted with an absolute disaster. If it's not bad enough that there is bribery and corruption in the government, it is also amongst God's people. There is idolatry, prostitution, unfaithfulness, greed, hatred wherever you look. And Micah is told to declare that because God is a God of justice, He will soon come and give these people what they deserve. Judgement will come. Starting with the people of God.

And so we come to the final chapter of this book and Micah personally processes what he is seeing and what he has been told is coming. And in doing so he provides us with a model of how we deal with disaster. What we are to do when our world falls apart. We are not to just ignore it. Or fight against it. Or

whinge or complain. For Micah gives us a six step process that over time will help us all face whatever the world throws at us. And it begins with

Slide 4

1. Step One - Crying (verses 1-6)

We have to acknowledge what we have lost. We need to allow our emotions to break through and come to the surface. Before we do anything we need to cry, lament. Look at how Micah begins *"What misery is mine!"* Or in the words of the KJV *"Woe is me!"*

Woe is me, sums up the feelings of those who have lost everything in a bushfire, whose lives have been devastated by COVID or cancer or divorce or pain. What misery is mine! Say it. Acknowledge it. Express it. Feel it. Don't ignore it. Don't pretend it isn't there. Life is like this. It often isn't fair. Slow down enough to lament over it. To cry over what has happened.

Micah does that. And he then writes down how he feels. *"I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave. ² The faithful have been swept from the land; not one upright person remains. Everyone lies in wait to shed blood; they hunt each other with nets."*

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Micah compares himself to a poor person who has gone to the fields after the harvest has been completed. The Israelites were meant to not harvest to edge of the fields. They were not to go back and pick up anything that they had missed or pick up anything they had dropped, it was there for the poor, those who had nothing to come along behind them. But when Micah gets to the fields, he finds out there is nothing that has been left for him. Everyone else seems to have got their share but he has missed out completely.

And the picture that Micah is painting here is not really about crops but about people. There is no godly people left in the land. The faithful have been swept away. And all that is left are the unfaithful, the evil, the ones who are only after number 1. So he laments about the social aspect of his life as well over the national aspect of his life.

Slide 6

³ "Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire— they all conspire together. ⁴ The best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge. The day God visits you has come, the day your watchmen sound the alarm. Now is the time of your confusion."

The heart of the problem is with the leadership over his nation. They are corrupt. They only do what they want to do. And that sets the pattern, the template for everyone else below them. They should be weaving together a society of peace, of love, of grace, of faithfulness but instead they are ripping these things to shreds. And that in turn is tearing apart the social fabric. It affects the social, the national and even the personal.

Slide 7

⁵ "Do not trust a neighbour; put no confidence in a friend. Even with the woman who lies in your embrace guard the words of your lips. ⁶ For a son dishonours his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— a man's enemies are the members of his own household."

You see the problem is not just out there but it's also in here. Even your own home is not safe. Your own family might be the ones that are causing the trouble. You would expect a bit of trouble with your neighbours and yes families at times do have their issues but you can't even trust your husband or wife. No wonder Micah is driven to tears.

Friends when was the last time you lamented the evil in this world, cried over what was going on in our nation, shed tears over the breakdown of the family? When did you last call a spade a spade and acknowledged that this world is broken and a broken world is going to hurt us badly. Often we Christians think we always have to be happy so we hide away our true feelings. But it is important to be honest with ourselves and with others.

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English preacher Carl Trueman puts it this way, *"If you do this," Trueman says, "you will have the resources to cope with your own times of suffering, despair and heartbreak and to keep worshiping and trusting through even the blackest of days. You will also develop a greater understanding of fellow Christians whose agonies of, say, bereavement, depression or despair sometimes make it difficult to (praise God) on Sunday mornings. And you will have more credible things to say to those shattered and broken individuals – be they burned out bank managers or down and out junkies to whom you may be called to be a witness of God's unconditional mercy and grace to the unloved and the unlovely."*

Slide 10

2. When dealing with a disaster, that's step up one cry. **Step Two – Confess (verse 7)**

Yet at the same time for the Christian we don't just lament we also trust. In the midst of these waves of despair there will also be periods of hope. Verse 7 *"But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear me."* Even when we are sitting in the ruins of our lives we can keep looking to God. Keep watching, keep trusting, keep searching for what he is doing.

We do have a hope, a living hope. God is in control. Which means I can wait for him. He will do something in his own good time. You see God's hands are not tied. I might want him to do something right here and now. I might feel I cannot cope with this for another day.

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But as Lamentations 3 says *"The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust— there may yet be hope."*

So we don't just cry out we confess our hope in the Lord. We know that He will hear us. We know that God will never abandon us. We know that God is truly with. In the ruins of our life. In the midst of our despair. In the good times and the bad times. **Slide 12** As Lam 3 continues *"For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone."*

Do you get what Micah is saying? Do you understand this second step? Micah is not saying "God will fix it. God will rescue me from my pain." He may, he might and we can certainly ask him to do just that. But he is saying, "God will hear me. God is the source of my hope. I will wait for him. He knows. He knows what I am going through. I will put my trust in Him." And the mere fact that Micah has expressed his pain and confessed his trust leads to the next step

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3. **Step 3 – Confidence. (Verses 8-13)**

The prophet has found for himself a ring of confidence, not in his own ability to cope but in a rising crescendo that God is in control. That what is happening all around him is not God's last word. God does promise to step in again in the future. So he expresses this confidence by saying. ⁸*"Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. ⁹Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and upholds my cause. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness."*

There is no tunnel so dark that there isn't a light at the end of it. There is no night so black that won't see a sunrise in the morning. There is no trouble so bad that God can't hold my hand and help me through it.

Now Micah is not presumptuous enough to say he won't ever fall. He is not naïve enough to think that life will always turn out how he wants it to turn out. Micah acknowledges there will be darkness and death and pain and bushfires and cancer. That is all true.

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But the day for building walls will come. The time for extending the national borders will arrive. People will come to God from every nation in the world, acknowledge his greatness, his power and his justice. For one day our fortunes will be restored. Our situation will be reversed and so will be the situation for those who seem to be doing the wrong thing and getting away with it scot free. They will come under God's righteous judgement.

Slide 15

¹⁰ *"Then my enemy will see it and will be covered with shame, she who said to me, 'Where is the LORD your God?' My eyes will see her downfall; even now she will be trampled underfoot like mire in the streets..."*

¹³ *The earth will become desolate because of its inhabitants, as the result of their deeds."*

Slide 16

That's the ring of confidence the Christian can have. God's hands are not tied. God's plans are still going to happen. God's presence is always with his son and daughter. So we get this confidence from our Father, from the Son, from the Holy Spirit. They are all working for our good. They are pleading your case. They have done everything, everything we need in order to have access to the presence of the Lord, the power of the Lord and promises of the Lord. And that will drive us, even in the midst of our difficulties, it will drive us to prayer.

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4. Step 4 – Common Prayer (verses 14-17)

As Emmanuel Katangole and Chris Rice say in their book "Reconciling All Things", *"The First language of the church in a deeply broken world should not be strategy but prayer."*

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They then quote Martin Luther King Jnr who on getting another death threat in the mail sat down and wrote these words, *"Lord I'm down here trying to do what is right but Lord I must confess that I'm weak now. I'm faltering. I'm losing my courage. Now I am afraid. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I cannot face it alone."*

And that is the point that God wants all of us to get to each and every day and especially when the waves of life have come crashing over us. How do the disciples put it "Where else have we to go when you have the words of eternal life?" Who else can we turn to when the bottom has dropped out of our world but you O Lord? And so Micah prays.

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¹⁴ *"Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, which lives by itself in a forest, in fertile pasturelands. Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in days long ago."*

Lord you promised in Psalm 23 that you would be our shepherd. So do what you have promised. Protect us. Feed us. Lead us. Teach us. We are your sheep. You have chosen us to be a part of your flock. So don't leave us to deal with the wolves and the bears by ourselves. Take us from the land of drought to the land of plenty. For we can't do this ourselves. And so as we pray we hand over our situation to you. And we hear the voice of God saying to us.

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¹⁵ *"As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show them my wonders."* ¹⁶ *Nations will see and be ashamed, deprived of all their power. They will put their hands over their mouths and their ears will become deaf.* ¹⁷ *They will lick dust like a snake, like creatures that crawl on the ground. They will come*

trembling out of their dens; they will turn in fear to the LORD our God and will be afraid of you."

God replies to Micah's prayer, yes I will answer your prayers. Like I did in the Exodus. Yes I will judge justly those who are doing wrong like I have done in the past. Yes not only will I reverse the situation of God's people and give them my promises but I will reverse the situation of God's enemies and give them what they deserve.

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For when we are in trouble prayer is one of the best ports in our storm. But one way we are called to pray is to wrap our prayers around God's promises. Micah here remembers the things that God has promised his people that he will do, like be their shepherd, like judge their enemies, like restore their fortunes into the future.

And that is a great model for our prayers. So when we get sick or we struggle with loneliness or there is tension in our family or even if we lose everything in a bushfire, we have no biblical mandate to pray "Lord take away this burden, this problem, this sickness." God doesn't promise us those things. But he does promise that he will bring good out of evil. That he will never leave us or forsake us. That he will heal us of our sins. That he will give us the ability to endure. And often we receive these things from God in prayer. So be involved in common prayer, to have confidence, to confess and to cry and lastly to celebrate.

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5. Step 5 – Celebrate (verses 18-20)

You see if the Lord is truly our light in our darkness. If he is our shepherd when we are the sheep, if he is God over His people as well as all the nations as our passage today has already stated, then it is not surprising to hear Micah exclaim, "Who is a God like you?"

And of course the answer is, there is no-one like God. No one so just, so powerful, so holy, so loving, so kind. But I find it interesting that Micah asks who is a God like you and then zeroes in on another blessing, the solution to a problem that has come up in Micah again and again and again. And that blessing is that God is the one who forgives us our sin.

Micah has been calling out his people. You have become tired with God. Who have become greedy. You are not looking after the poor, and widow and the child. You are just feathering your own nest. And because of all these things God is going to judge you for your sins. You are going to get what you deserve.

And yet here Micah exclaims there is no one like God who *"pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy."*¹⁹ *You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.*²⁰ *You will be faithful to Jacob, and show love to Abraham as you pledged on oath to our ancestors in days long ago."*

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God is so great that he can even forgive sin. Forgive idolatry. Forgive greed. He will not just liberate his people from their enemies he will liberate them from the power of sin and Satan. God's love, God's compassion, God's forgiveness is so great, so mighty, so amazing that he will not just drop your sins over the side of the boat, he will throw them, he will catapult them no he will hurl them into the depths of the sea. And he puts up a sign that says No fishing so there is no chance they can have be caught by us again!

Like Pharaoh and his armies were hurled into the Red Sea and were never able to come back and haunt the people under Moses leadership so God will get rid of everything that has been weighing us down and keeping us from a full fellowship with God. Sin will get the Egyptian treatment, once and for all.

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I wonder do you realise that the Jewish people every year on the Jewish New Year would go to a stream or river and symbolically empty their sins from their pockets into the water. At the same time they would recite these words, ¹⁸ *“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin & forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.”* ¹⁹ *You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.”*

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How wonderful that is? All my greed can be forgiven. All my selfishness. All my failures. All my obsessions. All my wrong words, all my poor decisions, all my silly actions. Forgiven. And cast into the stream to go to the sea and be lost forever in the oceans of the world. How amazing is that grace? But the story of Micah doesn't end there. All the strands of teaching and judgment and forgiveness are woven together to give us a picture of the cross of Christ.

6. Cross of Christ.

For if you think about you could get a worse disaster than the cross of Christ. An innocent man judged unjustly. A man coming to give life getting death. Abandoned by some. Accused by others. And rejected by all. In his day of disaster he picks up Micah's five step process & he cries out, “Lord O Lord why have you abandoned me?” He trust this God “Into your hands I commit my spirit.” He offers the thief on the cross hope, “this very day you I will see you in paradise.” He forgives his enemies “Forgive them for they do not know what they do” And he ensures this life and even his death is an object of praise to his father God.

This is the shepherd of the flock, leading his sheep to eternal life through the clutches of death. This is the one who never sinned drinking down the cup of God's wrath that was destined for the sinner. This is the one who shows us that these five steps work because on the third day God did what he promised and rose him from the dead.

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And so this is the last step of our dealing with disaster. We cry out and lament, we trust in God and confess our hope is in him, we put our confidence in Him. We pray to Him. We praise Him. And we look to Jesus Christ. The cross and the empty tomb. The pain and the pleasure. This Jesus is with us in all our difficulties. This Jesus will be like a good shepherd & lead us into life eternal. This Jesus will help me face anything this world throws at me.

In the middle of last year, the people of Hong Kong started protesting against the tyranny of the Chinese government. They filled the city centre. They lined up face to face against government troops. And do you know what the theme song to all their protests were? They sang the song “Sing Hallelujah to the Lord! Sing, Christ is risen from the dead!” That's what were singing. In the midst of their darkest days. In the face of unjustified provocation, they put their hope in God. And sung and prayed looking to him to give them the victory.

Song – I have a shelter <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCxhyiXQO9M>

Song – Sing Hallelujah to the Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks7HY4gob2A>

Benediction

¹⁸ *Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.* ¹⁹ *You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.* ²⁰ *You will be faithful to Jacob, and show love to Abraham as you pledged on oath to our ancestors in days long ago.*

⁸ *He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

Morning Tea

Our morning tea is a vital way that we give and receive fellowship during a time like this. We don't want to be just consumers of Church, we want to be a part of the family of God. So why not give one or two people a call. Who might your ring now?