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## Walking Humbly with God (Micah 6: 6-8)

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While Sarah is away over the next couple of weeks, some members of Benedictus will be reflecting on the theme “Call and Response” – a theme that we explored last year when Sarah was away. I feel very privileged to begin this series with some thoughts about my faith journey and where I am today. So let me begin by filling in some background.

I grew up in Sydney where my dad had a small business. Mum and Dad did not have much schooling and they emphasised to my sister and me the importance of education – I was the first in my immediate family to go to University. A formative part of my growing up was the tension in our home over religion. Seven years after they were married, mum came to a Christian faith at the 1959 Billy Graham crusade and she became a key part of our local Evangelical Anglican church. For dad, all this stuff about bible studies and prayer meetings was just too much – for him, it was just going ‘overboard’. So when as a teenager, I too came to a faith, I became even more alive to the tensions at home. Our local church became an important part of my life, but I often felt that I fell short because I wasn’t focussed on evangelising or witnessing to Dad – in fact, quite the opposite. I would rather avoid such conversations and the angry responses they could evoke.

Reflecting on these internal struggles early in my faith journey, I have found some of Geraldine Doogue’s observations about her Catholic upbringing helpful. She describes a growing sense of gratitude for being rooted in a belief tradition rather than **not** having one, even if she rejected parts of it. She realised it had bequeathed her a precious identity plus an ability to ask deeper questions about meaning in life, even though she concedes it took years to fully develop that. Geraldine expresses

elegantly how I feel about my early Sydney upbringing with its powerful mixture of feeling like I had found a spiritual home and anxiety about not measuring up.

A key person who has been with me on this journey, helping me to grapple with some of those deeper questions has been my wife Elizabeth. We met at the local Fellowship group when we were both going to University. We got married after I came to Canberra and we settled into work and family life together. Elizabeth has been a companion and supporter of my on-going faith journey. Together with our two children, Andrew and Kathryn, they have been key people in shaping who I am – through their love, care and support; and through keeping me grounded in the things that really matter in life.

So that is a bit about me, now let me say a few words about “Call and Response” in the context of my journey. Looking back, I’m not sure that I have ever responded to a still small voice, a ‘call’ – though I am not denying that others have had such an experience. As I reflect, I have had various opportunities throughout life; what Frances MacKay might call “invitations”. Some I have taken, some I have not. What I have learned is that we are faced constantly with choices and that God’s Spirit is present in those moments, drawing us on to new levels of understanding, insight and awareness. The critical thing, as John Taylor says in his book “The Go-Between God”, is to “choose”; to take the step and trust God will be with us in it and where it leads. On the question of the “right choice” or the “right path” – I have been encouraged by the words of the Spanish poet Antonio Machado who wrote “There is no road; the road is made by walking”. For me, this resonates with Taylor’s view of God’s Spirit working in and through our choices, and being with us in our “walking”; and “walking” within the company of a faith community.

That is how I have felt in respect of both my work and my churching. I came to Canberra, to the Australian Public Service, on a graduate program. I wasn’t too sure what I wanted to do but I was always interested in politics and government. So Canberra seemed an exciting place to come - and it was. I don’t think I sensed a call

but I felt comfortable here. I believed, and still do, in the critical importance of a good Public Service; of high quality public policy and administration. I had various opportunities which I took and which afforded me some wonderful and some not so wonderful experiences; and opportunities to exercise my leadership and pastoral abilities within the agencies in which I worked. I also chose not to take some job offers. Did I respond appropriately? Well, I think I responded consistent with my sense of my abilities and values. As Gerard Hughes, the Jesuit writer, says “God’s will is not an impersonal blueprint for living forced on us by a capricious God and contrary to almost every inclination within us. God’s will is our freedom. God wants us to discover what we really want and who we really are.”

In this context, churching has been a key activity for me. Early on in our marriage, Elizabeth and I found our way into a home church. These were small groups modelled on the New Testament meetings in homes - typically held around a meal with singing, praying, reflecting and talking together over several hours. For me, it was a perfect fit. I slipped right in and found encouragement and nurture - a group that endorsed the notion of lay ministry, wherever we might be. This was important in helping me to understand my work as part of my vocation. Were we “called” to this form of churching? Well, through a series of apparent happenstances it was an opportunity that presented and, for me at that time, it was undoubtedly a gift – I felt like I had come home as I chose to walk that path.

In much the same way, Benedictus feels like a gift to me now. The right place at the right time on my journey.

So what about life today? Since I have retired, I am still exploring possible pathways. It is taking time and clearly requires “being open” to what might emerge – and there are already a variety of things involved. I am still “being introduced to” this new phase of life. And Benedictus, and the community here, is very much part of that “introduction” - helping me to be more present; to reflect and acquire a more

expansive view of God; and accept myself, and the freedom that Jesus offers, more fully.

I want to conclude with two thoughts:

From the outset of my faith journey, I have had a continuing sense that I have been “held onto” by God; that notwithstanding my struggles and various shortcomings, God was still there for me. Dietrich Bonhoeffer at the conclusion of his wonderful poem “Who am I?” put it this way: “Who am I? This or the other? Am I one person today, and tomorrow another? ... Who am I? They mock me these lonely questions of mine. Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine”. I am not comparing myself with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, but I find this poem really captures how I have felt on my journey.

At this point in time a question remains: Can I just wait and “be” for a while? Well that is my test - but the prophet Micah reminds us of what God requires of us – to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. And, importantly, what the prophet is telling us is that God is prepared to walk with **us** – not behind; not ahead; but along with us. That, I find, a great encouragement.

I look forward to continuing this walk with you.