

Sermon Micah: What Does the Lord Require.

I think it's true to say that many of us have favorite passages in the Bible, with phrases and verses that are memorable or inspiring or comforting for us, and which come to mind at significant moments in our lives. I think it's also true that there are some passages that are essential to keep in mind if we are people of faith as we journey through life. One of those passages is in today's reading from Micah. What does the Lord require of you?

We do not know a lot about the prophet Micah, we do know the justice issues he faced during the eighth century B.C. were very like some of those we face today. The chosen people then knew God was tangible and personal as His promise 'I will be with you' had been written in the words of the prophet Isaiah to assure them. But Micah lived in the land of Judah during a time of great wealth and prosperity. On the outside it appeared that God's people were thriving, but on the inside, they were rotting to the core. Political corruption was pervasive. Financial exploitation was rampant! Ethical violations too. The nation had drifted so far from God they could no longer tell the difference between good and evil. Even though they were going through the outward motions of worship, their hearts were far from what God wanted from them. Much like America today, their society was characterized by arrogance and self-indulgence. Huge wealth was concentrated in the hands of the elite while poor people barely got by. Greed and arrogance took the place of rightness and justice and fairness. People talked the talk, but did not walk the talk, so their words were empty.

And then Micah blew the whistle on all by announcing what God's judgment would be on those not walking the talk unless they changed their ways. His whistle blowing prophecy delivered a message of judgment along with the hope of that God's people would return to adhering to righteousness from the mess of the world that they were living in. Even the world of nature is asked to participate, as the mountains and the hills

long there before mankind are called to be witnesses of the mess that has overcome the inherent goodness of what God intended.

But Micah tells that though God was faithful to his people, many had abandoned God, and the same alas might be said of our own time. Micah asks What would please God? What kind of religious observances are acceptable? How are the faithful meant to live to be acceptable in God's eyes? And the answer is God wants something deep from His people, he wants their hearts.

The point of Micah's address to the people is if we want to live a life that pleases God, we must act justly, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

But like the land of Judah in Micah's day, America is experiencing a time of abundant wealth and prosperity; but our country is plagued by the sins of overconfidence, self-sufficiency, self-indulgence, economic injustice, racism, bigotry, hatred, greed and much more. Outwardly, many have more money and resources than at any other time, yet we have drifted dangerously far from God. Terrible claims and excuses are boldly professed in the name of Christianity, and within political agendas nationally. Church attendance in all denominations continues to decline as unnecessary and pointless, replaced by sport and recreation. Some people still go to church, but why are they there? Is it in a real sense of worshiping and devotion, or is it an empty ritual and lip service social event with music, and we can take it or leave it if we don't like it?

So, what is to be done for those who recognize the need for living according to what would put them in good relationship with God? Micah's response with the three things God want most from us presents us with decisions to make all the time. When we see injustice, will we do something about it and work to bring about change, or will we ignore it and pretend it isn't happening? To act justly may mean speaking up about unethical practices or abuses we observe happening in the workplace, in our community or even in the country; confronting racism and bigotry when we see it. Justice is

something to be done, and it's a fundamental tenet of Christianity to be called on to raise our voices against oppression of any kind.

How about pleasing God by loving kindness and showing mercy. This is the most essential requirement of what Jesus commanded of us, that we should love others as He loved and loves us. Treat other people as we would like to be treated. We do that in ways that fit in with our lives, like volunteering in the food pantry, and in the myriad volunteer opportunities to help those in need, at home and abroad, offering our skills time and talents. But it can also be as difficult as forgiving someone who has wounded you with their words or injured you by their actions.

Upholding justice and living with kindness and mercy are requirements for good relationships with other people we encounter in life, But, the third requirement to walk humbly with God is to live in awe of God, in relationship with God, and live honoring God.

And so if we live into these ideals we would get a glimpse of the kind of world Jesus is talking about in today's gospel reading, in His sermon on the mount, when he sets out the Beatitudes, the eleven blessings present if there is to be a world as God sees it. A world where true discipleship exists, as Deacon Jane preached about last time. And when we do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God, our very lives and beings become living depictions of what God's intends and requires for the world to be like.

It's unsurprising that what prophets and Jesus Himself were teaching centuries ago still applies today. God is not asking for us to do the impossible. What He wants is our hearts to be changed to love him, love others, and follow what he has told us to do. A bumper sticker saying of our time is becoming: do acts of random kindness, and it's good to see and hear of people being just, kind and humble. Hopefully may the same be said of you and me.

AMEN

