**January 29, 2023 Micah 1:1-8**

***What Does God Require***

**Scripture:** Micah 6:1-8 NRSV

*(1)Hear what the LORD says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. (2)Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the LORD has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. (3)"O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! (4)For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. (5)O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the LORD." (6)"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? (7)Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (8)He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:1-8 NRSV*

**Notes:**

1. What do we know about the prophet ***Micah***?
   1. Micah was a ***country*** prophet who spoke for powerless.
      1. “*…my people have risen up as an enemy. You strip the robe and clothing from those who pass by without a care…You drive the women of my people out from their pleasant houses; from their young children you take away my blessing forever*.” *(Micah 2:8-9)*
   2. Micah exposed the ***corruption*** of business leaders,
      1. “*Shall I be pure with dishonest scales, and with a bag of deceitful weights? Her rich men are full of violence, her inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their speech*.” *(Micah 6:11-12)*
   3. Micah condemns ***greedy*** priests and prophets.
      1. “*Her leaders judge for bribes, and her priests teach for a price, and her prophets of it tell fortunes for money: yet they lean on Yahweh, and say, ‘Isn’t Yahweh in the midst of us? No disaster will come on us.'*” *(Micah 3:11)*
   4. The people replaced heartfelt worship with ***empty*** ***ritual***.
2. Justice is ***truth*** in action.
   1. Acting justly, takes ***practice***.
   2. Execute the truth in action; in ***harmony*** and ***unity***.
   3. To do justice is to do things ***right***.
      1. “*In everything do to others as you would have them do to you…” Matthew 7:12 NRSV*
   4. God calls us to make a ***difference***.
3. Love ***kindness***,
   1. Do ***nice*** things for others.
   2. loving kindness is more about ***blessing*** somebody else.
4. Walk ***humbly*** with God.
   1. The God of Micah was ***concrete*** and ***personal***.
   2. Our God is a God we can relate to as ***friend*** to ***friend***.
   3. Remember our place and know we ***stand*** with God.
5. Appreciate what an honor it is to ***walk*** with God.
   1. Act ***justly***, love ***mercy***, and walk ***humbly*** with the Lord.
   2. Express your faith in ***deeds*** of loving kindness.

**Script:**

Have you ever read the books of the Bible right before the New Testament begins? Do you know what these books are referred to? The Old Testament is divided into sections. First is the Pentateuch, the first five books of scripture, credited to Moses as the one who wrote them down. Next are the books referred to as the History, Joshua through Esther, After the History we enter into the wisdom books where we hear some of the philosophical wisdom of the Israelites in the books of Job through Solomon. Next, we enter into the Major Prophets. The writings of prophets from Isaiah through to Daniel. And finally, we get to what is referred to as the Minor Prophets.

The “major” and “minor” labels do not really imply that one set of prophets are more important than the other. Length is the main determining factor when deciding whether a prophet is major or minor. Basically, we find that Major Prophets had a lot mor to say, and the Minor Prophets really said what they needed to say and then finished. Both labels are used strictly within the Old Testament.

I am sure you have heard of all of the Major Prophets, People like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. But there is less known about and heard from the Minor Prophets. They are short and to the point. But that does not make them any less important. Today we will be looking at a passage from the minor prophet of Micah. He’s referred to in the Bible as one of the Minor Prophets. That’s because the Book of Micah, as I said before, is relatively short, as compared to, say, Isaiah and Jeremiah. But, as we’ll see, he’s anything but minor league when it comes to proclaiming God’s Word. He’s a force to be reckoned with. Stand with me as we share our passage today from Micah 6:1-8

*Micah 6:1-8 NRSV (1)Hear what the LORD says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. (2)Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the LORD has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. (3)"O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! (4)For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. (5)O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the LORD." (6)"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? (7)Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (8)He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:1-8 NRSV*

So, what do we know about the prophet Micah? For one thing, he lived in the little rural village of Moresheth, about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem, not far from what we now call the Gaza Strip. He lived in the mid-to-early 8th century B.C. and was a contemporary of Isaiah, Amos and Hosea. He may have even studied under Isaiah. He was certainly familiar with Isaiah’s prophecy. But, while Isaiah lived in the city of Jerusalem in the thick of politics and religion, Micah was a man of humble origins. Micah lived close to the people and to the soil.

Commentator Bernhard Anderson says of Micah: “Unlike the city-bred Isaiah, Micah was a country prophet who spoke for poor farmers suffering at the hands of powerful landlords.” (Understanding the Old Testament, p. 304) No wonder, then, we find him championing the cause of the poor and powerless and wagging his finger at the wealthy saying, “*…my people have risen up as an enemy. You strip the robe and clothing from those who pass by without a care…You drive the women of my people out from their pleasant houses; from their young children you take away my blessing forever*.” *(Micah 2:8-9)*

Micah exposed the corruption of business leaders, who exploited the weak for personal gain. He says, “*Shall I be pure with dishonest scales, and with a bag of deceitful weights? Her rich men are full of violence, her inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their speech*.” *(Micah 6:11-12)*

As much as anything, Micah condemns the priests and prophets for being in it only for the money. He says, “*Her leaders judge for bribes, and her priests teach for a price, and her prophets of it tell fortunes for money: yet they lean on Yahweh, and say, ‘Isn’t Yahweh in the midst of us? No disaster will come on us.'*” *(Micah 3:11)* But he reserves his most scathing criticism for the hollow religious practices of his day.

One commentator writes, “The people were religious, but theirs was an empty ceremonialism.” Another says, “Religion had become a matter of form; ceremonial observances were thought to meet all religious requirements. The people believed as long as they performed the external acts of worship they were entitled to the divine favor and protection.” And yet another adds, “The people replaced heartfelt worship with empty ritual, thinking that this is all God demands.” (Al Maxey at <http://www.zianet.com/maxey/Proph11.htm>)

All of this leads Micah to prophesy:“*How shall I come before Yahweh, and bow myself before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams? With tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my disobedience? The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good. What does Yahweh require of you, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?*” *(Micah 6:6-8)*

And there we find it; the short list of how we are supposed to behave and act: act justly, love Mercy, and walk humbly with the Lord. What does it mean to act justly; obviously we are to not only promote justice, but we are to live it out daily. So, what is justice? A man named Ben Disraeli, a British statesman from the 1800’s, identifies justice as truth in action.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. I was in a store a while back and the young girl waiting on me was obviously inexperienced, I’m guessing it was maybe her first or second day on the job. I paid cash for my items with a $10 bill. As she was counting out the change, she gave me change back from $20. I knew I did not have a twenty in my wallet so I handed her back the extra $10 and told her she’d given me too much change back. She looked shocked and grateful all at the same time. She thanked me and said it would have come out of her salary. And then she asked me, *“Why did you do that? I mean, you didn’t have to. You could have kept the money and no one would have known the difference, why?”* I explained to her, *“that I was a pastor and that would have been dishonest of me.”*

Now I am setting myself up here as a good example, but trust me there have been times when I made mistakes and was not the bastion of honesty and morality that I would like to be. Acting justly, takes practice. I remember in high school when I was in the band. We would play songs over and over so that each instrument would get the song correct. There would be times when the band director would stop everything and point out the instruments that were not playing up to expectations. So, he would make a section play their parts alone. Then he would add another section and have them play together, and then one by one he would add another section until everybody was playing their part correctly and they were playing in unity and harmony with the rest of the band. Such is life, we each have our part to play, and we must practice that part every day until we get it right; then we must continue to practice and play that part in harmony and unity with those around us. Not only must we continue to execute the truth in action, but we must continue to do that in harmony and unity with the world around us. It takes practice and persistence.

Micah’s call for justice, reminds me of this: To do justice is to do things right. It’s to think and act nobly. It’s to live up to the highest standards of conduct, and that includes fairness and working together: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you…” Matthew 7:12 NRSV And, if that’s the case, justice is slipping away in our world today. We have companies who are manipulating the laws of supply and demand in order to drive the price of their product up while the cost of their production remains relatively the same. We call this price gouging and we can see it in our supply chain now more than ever. The prices of gasoline, prescription drugs, and our basic food sources all being driven out of the range of the consumers ability to buy it. Who would have thought that a dozen of eggs would ever be at $6/dozen.

The Law of Moses knew all about the reality of human greed. And so, it required landowners not to harvest their crops up to the very edge of the fields or to glean the fields of every last kernel of wheat. In this way, peasants could come behind the gleaners and collect the spoils, so they have enough to feed their families. (Exodus 19:9-10)

For Micah, God’s word is clear: There’s more to life than making money. God calls us to make a difference. And to make a difference requires that we do justice. And to do justice is to serve the common good. Make a profit, yes. Just don’t allow greed to take over. Take only what you need, not what you can get by with. Act in the best interest of all concerned. And always remember: When you take more than your share, somebody may have to do without.

The second part of Micah’s prescription is to love kindness, and, when I think of kindness, I think of the phrase, “Practice Random Acts of Kindness.” In other words, do nice things for others spontaneously – especially those you don’t know – and, if possible, do it anonymously with no thought of recognition or reward.

Years ago I remember seeing commercials about passing it on; one particular ad shows someone reaching out to keep a pedestrian from stepping in front of an oncoming car. Another bystander notices and, as she walks down the sidewalk, lends a helping hand to a total stranger. Yet another bystander notices and does something nice for someone else. The chain reaction continues until one act of kindness leads to another, and to another, and another.

What’s funny is I tried to find it this week so I could show it to you, but I couldn’t find it. It’s as if the ad itself is a random act of kindness, and that, to me, makes it all the more compelling to watch. But for us, loving kindness is more about realizing the blessing you receive when you bless somebody else without expecting anything in return. But let me put this other statement in here. When you refuse to allow somebody to do something nice for you, when you refuse to let somebody else bless you; you are in fact stealing their blessing away. This is why it is important to allow others to bless you when they try.

So, … we’re to do justice, love kindness and – the third ingredient – we’re to walk humbly with God. In my studies, I have learned that the Jewish faith is the first of the major religions to think of God as a person with qualities you can relate to. For example, Genesis 3:8 and 9: “*Yahweh God walking in the garden in the cool of the day… called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?'*” *(Genesis 3:8-9)* While this may sound familiar to our ears, in the development of religious thinking, it was revolutionary. The gods of other faiths were vague and abstract; the God of the Hebrews was concrete and personal – and, yes man-like. God interacted with his chosen people directly. He spoke to them. He heard their cries. He promised repeatedly, “*I will be with you*.” (e.g., Isaiah 43:2) He reassured them, “Do not be afraid.”

This is the type of God Micah had in mind when he said that we ought to walk humbly with God. Our God is a God we can relate to as friend to friend. We build a relationship with our God as we walk in His ways and in His shadow. As we grow closer to our God, we begin to understand more clearly what He expects from us, and how we are to do that. To walk humbly with God is also to remember our place and to know that we stand with God, not as equals, but as invited guests; never forgetting for a moment that God is our Creator, and we are but part of God’s creation.

In a book entitled, **Living With Contradiction**, written by Esther de Waal; she points out that humility comes from the word, humus, a word that’s sometimes used to describe compost. So that to walk humbly with God is to remember, with every step you take, that you are of the earth – mortal, not divine. Ironically, knowing that makes you appreciate all the more what an honor it is to walk with God.

Allow me to sum this up for you this morning. Micah asks a rhetorical question with the answer right in the midst of the query. “What does Yahweh require of you, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” That, in a nutshell, is the essence of a life of faith.

You see this every day, in our community. Have you ever seen somebody checking out at the grocery store, the entire purchase were the staples of life, and when the total is revealed, the customer is not able to pay the bill. But rather than returning the items which, were so badly needed, to the store shelves; a perfect stranger steps up and says put that on my bill; and the stranger pays for the groceries. We see this in emergencies, when the call is made and if you stand at the fire hall or ambulance building; you see perfect strangers, running to the aid and at times risking their lives, for somebody they do not know. They do not do this out of a desire for attention or praise, they do it because they care for their fellow man, they do it because that is the call God has upon their life, they do it because it is the right thing to do. They act justly, they love mercy, and they strive to walk humbly with the Lord. These people express their faith not in words, but in deeds of loving kindness.

I wonder, is that how you live your life? Where can you do the right thing? How can you show mercy and love to others in our community? Are you living a kind and humble life; I pray this morning that you are and as you do, you do so in the company of our Lord Jesus Christ.