

“What Does God Require?...Really”

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Micah 6:1-8; Matthew 25:45

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From the Pulpit

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A Call for Social Action is times like these

I would like to share some thoughts from the 8th century prophet, Micah.

His writings, for me are linking to something called, “The Social Gospel.”

The social gospel – a movement In North America that applied Christian ethics to social problems: especially problems like economic inequality, poverty, racial tensions (but today it’s more like systemic racism); public school education, criminal justice issues, the environment, and militarism. I believe the social gospel is “applied” theology. It’s one thing to be a theologian but it’s another to apply the gospel or theology to life.

With all that I see and hear, it seems that something is deeply wrong in our world. It appears that we have returned to issues that seem worse today than they were 50 years ago; I say, 100 years ago, and I ponder this thought –

“God - what are you asking me, as a person of the book to do in times like these?”

How are we to treat one another today?

How are we to provide and protect those who are among the most vulnerable in our society?

What are the issues of the day that I NEED to pay attention to?

What is our responsibility? To really make it personal – God, what are you asking ME to do in times like the these– *what do you require...really?*”

And I hope that it is a question you may have been asking yourself...

I think I am on my text.

Let me frame the text in its original context and then move us towards its applicability in times like these.

The prophet Micah was called to speak to the people on God’s behalf and then to speak back to the God on behalf of the people.

Micah, who is in the company of Jeremiah and Isaiah, *but considered one of the Minor Prophets*, not because his voice was any less important than the others, but because his writing was shorter.

Micah is best known for this passage is chapter 6:

Don't read Micah if you want to be politically correct.

Or if you want to easy words – Micah was a thunderous prophet who loved Israel and wanted them to understand that they had some responsibility to do the right thing.

Micah's message offers for us, a call to action for today's issues

New Living Translation:

“Stand up and state your case against me.

Let the mountains and hills be called to witness your complaints.

² And now, O mountains, listen to the Lord's complaint!

He has a case against his people. He will bring charges against Israel.

³ “O my people, what have I done to you? What have I done to make you tired of me? Answer me!

⁴ For I brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from slavery.

I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to help you.

⁵ Don't you remember, my people, how King Balak of Moab tried to have you cursed and how Balaam son of Beor blessed you instead?

And remember your journey from Acacia Grove^[a] to

Gilgal, when I, the Lord, did everything I could to teach you about my faithfulness.”

⁶ What can we bring to the Lord? Should we bring him burnt offerings?

Should we bow before God Most High with offerings of yearling calves?

⁷ Should we offer him thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for our sins?

⁸ No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

There is a second text that gives us a glimpse of the final judgment when we will have to give an answer for our behavior. That text is found in Matthew 25;

King James Version (I grew up with the KJV and it continues to be my primary preaching and teaching translation)

⁸ He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

New Testament: Matthew 25: 45

And he will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’

Let me take a moment to provide the context for the content of this portion of Micah’s message and “a call for action for today’s issues”

do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

Because it is at the end of chapter six that we focus on what is required of the people, but without knowing how God has spoken to the people regarding their behavior, the 6th chapter does not make a lot of sense.

In Chapter 2, God condemns the people of privilege in power who exploit the weak: God says they covet the fields and houses and take from the poor and trick people out of their houses by fraud and violence; when women and children are stripped from their God given (today we would add, and **constitutionally protected**) right.

When you have power – you are supposed to HELP people and not oppress them with the law.

Micah is tough – but remember that prophets speak to God on behalf of the people; and then speak to the people on behalf of God.

The leaders of Israel are called out and told that “they” are supposed to know right from wrong – that they hate good and love evil.

Micah writes that poor people are being oppressed. He calls out the religious leaders who walk alongside the political leaders and suggests that they devour the people – that they tear the flesh off the bones of the people. That they chop of the people like meat.

He compares the leaders to cannibals in chapter three.

When political leaders hurt poor people, and step on people and - it’s a form of political cannibalism

Throughout chapters 2 and 3 and 4 and 5 – there is an indictment against the people of Israel for their failure to protect the people.

Whenever there is injustice God will raise up a people to remind us – what is required to bring about social change.

Micah, through God’s voice, reminds Israel of how God has been faithful and lays out the case for why they should be responsive to the poor and the maltreated.

Can't you hear God saying to America - I brought you from the two world wars; and I brought you through not one depression but several stages of depression in the 20th century; I have been with you through 911 and Katrina and so many other tragedies – and “this” is how you treat the least of these!

God says –I've been good to you throughout trials and tribulations.

We will be judged by how we respond to how what God requires.

We must stand up and speak out against injustice and arrogance -

We cannot be quiet during time of seeing injustice

Some will say – “well, that's not my fight” so they do not become engage in social struggles.

It's not an option to stay on the sidelines when people are dying

When the policies of leaders are not benign, and hurt people: someone must stand up and protest.

Cornell west says- love is what justice looks like in public

What does the Lord require -?

The Lord requires that we:

- * Protest and criticize the injustices we see.
- * We can address the issues of poverty
- * We can protect and defend.

We can give people a living wage

We can love people regardless of race and class and gender identity

We can provide health care

We can resist division and mean-spirited politics and politics

In times like these - Trust in God's power because there is a God somewhere -

There is a god that controls the rising of the sun and the setting down of the same.

There is a god somewhere....

When I lived in the commonwealth of Massachusetts, there was legislator who wanted to re-instate the death penalty - but by the time God sent a prophet in the personhood of Sister

Helen Prejean - he changed his mind... There is NO death penalty today in Massachusetts.

Don't tell me what God can't do

Don't tell me what God can't do in the personhood of one who will stand up for justice

Don't tell me what God can't do

God will work through you. And God will work through me.

In the final judgment – the question will be “I assure you when you refused to help my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.”

In as much as you've done it to the least of these you've done it upon me

God will use your voice

And you don't have to cuss

God will use your feet

Stand for justice

Love mercy

But stay humble and let the Lord use you

What does God ask in times like these ——

Let me close with these quick thoughts on Standing for Justice, Loving Mercy and staying humble so that the Lord can use you.

1. Principles are bigger than affiliations

Micah is a call for action – Let me suggest that there are some principles that are bigger than human affiliation:

Treating folks right – **feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, providing living wages and education, and nondiscriminatory voting rights.**

Being fair - caring for the poor

Using your power to help and not to destroy

Doing justice – has no social affiliation, it is not republican or democratic – it's not independent, it's not black vs white; it is doing what is right.

What does the Lord require today —

God requires *principles* that matter more than *political* designations.

2. Mercy tells us we must stand up and show mercy

Jesus loved mercy

If loving mercy is dangerous – then Jesus was dangerous and destructive –

(How do I know that – because he didn't condemn the woman caught in adultery; and he healed blind Bartimaeus and he healed the man at the pool of Siloam whom the disciples thought his blindness was the result of his parents' sin –

(how I would like to work with that...don't have time)

That's health care to the needy.

If justice and mercy are dangerous, then the Bible is dangerous and destructive.

Because the bible is filled with justice and mercy

If following Jesus is dangerous and destructive – then so was Dietrich Bonhoeffer – who took on the Nazis in the last century.

Bonhoeffer was safe in America but went back to Germany and was hung just days before liberation.

(I note that some of you will be reading his classic: *The Cost of Discipleship* – one of my favorite books on what it costs to be a follower of Jesus – a brown man raised in the ghetto.

3. **And finally, walk humbly with God.** My grandmother used to say – I don't care how much education you get, don't get too big for your britches.

Don't get so uppity that you can't help somebody in need.

In other words, don't become so full of yourself that you can't help somebody else.

After all, you didn't get here by yourself. That's the problem with some folks – they think they did it all by themselves.

Well, I'm here to tell you that you may not want to acknowledge this, but somebody paved the way for you.

There is a God somewhere.

Did God wake you up this morning?

When we stay humble, God will work on our behalf

When David stayed humble, God put a rock in his hand to slay a giant.

When Moses stayed humble, God put a staff in his hand to part the red sea.

When Thurgood Marshall stayed humble, God used him to fight

And when it's all said and done, God is going to have the final say.

One of these days God is going to separate the goats from the sheep.

And on that day, the final question will be –

when I was hungry – did you feed me,

When I was naked – did you clothe me.

When I was sick – did you care about me.

And I hope you have an answer – because God will say

As you have done it to the least of these – you have also done it unto me.

You better get humble and know that there is a God somewhere.

You better do right and walk in humility to make a difference.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love

And they know we are Christians by how we show mercy

And they'll know we are Christians by how we treat one another.

Will they know you are a Christian?

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