

Pastor Jon's Sermon from February 1-2, 2020

Text: Micah 6:1-8.

“What does the Lord Require of You?”

What does the Lord require of you? These are the words of the Prophet Micah in chapter 6 verse 8 from our first lesson for today.

I love it when scripture is clear about what God expects of us. This is one of those passages in the Bible that you should commit to memory.

The prophet Micah is writing to the Israelites around 700 B.C. because they have forgotten the saving acts of God and what it means to be in a right relationship with God. They forgot how God brought them out of slavery into freedom from Egypt.

Micah reminds the Israelites they lost their way and neglected God's word. There were problems in their holiest temple. Micah 3:11 says, “Its rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money.” There was corruption in the seats of power. As a result of their turning away from God, they were going to be conquered by the Assyrians... the world power of the time. Micah was calling the people to account and simply wanted them to return to pure worship and works of social justice.

In chapter 4, Micah said that out of Bethlehem will come a new king... a shepherd king who will feed his flock. “He shall be the one of peace.” We quote these texts during advent and Christmas. We believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy... this new shepherd king that came into the world.

Micah answers the question, “What does the Lord require of you?” by saying O mortal, you already know the answer... you already know what is good. I have taught you in my scriptures. But you have chosen to ignore it. It is to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. God says, “I don't need your animal sacrifices anymore when you sin. I want your skin in the game.”

For Micah, true religion is this... when the people of God listen to the cries of others for justice and act; when the people of God are kind and merciful to others in word and deed; and when they know deep

down that it is God who provides for them. Then they are in a right relationship with God.

In the New Testament, this is called Kingdom language. Jesus teaches Kingdom parables all the time about his reign on earth. It is different than that of empire. The Kingdom of God is like... a mustard seed... or the Kingdom of Heaven is like. When we pray “Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done in the Lord’s Prayer,” we are praying that Micah 6:8 comes to be reality among us. So today, as we focus on hunger with the Souper Bowl of Caring, we are in essence offering a gentle critique to remember that Madison Avenue isn’t our God. Coke, Doritos, and Budweiser won’t complete us. Instead, we are trying to live out the petition in the Lord’s Prayer of give us this day our daily bread. Here, we are praying here that our symbolic act of bringing food and funds for hunger remind us other mouths need to be fed.

In our adult study on Sundays based on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and the book Contrast Community, Author, Dr. Jim Bailey, had a quote in the chapter on the Lord’s Prayer that applies here. “Kingdom people seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice; church people often put church work above concerns of justice, mercy and truth. Church people think about how to get people into church; Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; Kingdom people work to see the church change the world.” This is a quote from Howard Snyder, who claims Christians should be called “kingdom people” rather than “church people.”

Which would you rather be, “Kingdom people” or “church people”?

Unfortunately we are humans and we fall short of being Kingdom People daily. Whether at church or in our personal lives, we like to think of ourselves first. As a pastor, many of my thoughts are in the category of church people. I am reminded in this sermon of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount that if we seek first the Kingdom of God, all these things will be given to us as well. When we practice Kingdom values, the church will grow and be more relevant in the world.

Finally, Jesus teaches these kingdom values in the Beatitudes in our Gospel for today. Jesus turns the world upside down and tells his followers who is blessed in his Kingdom. And it isn't who you normally think... the rich and powerful, the good looking, etc. Jesus says people who are poor in Spirit, those who mourn, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for justice are blessed. In other words, People who know they can't go it alone... or realize a poverty in their own spirit, people who are grieving, people who can't speak for themselves, and those who cry out for justice are blessed in Jesus' kingdom. And, those who are merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for seeking Justice are blessed in Jesus' Kingdom. I could take days to unpack this, so I won't.

But I get the sense that to us who have already been promised salvation by grace through faith on account of Jesus alone have a great responsibility. We have been given the gift of salvation and eternal life through our faith. The question becomes "now what?" What do we do with our freedom in Christ? Spider Man's uncle Ben said, "With great power comes great responsibility." Jesus said, "To those for whom much is given, much is required." We are blessed with much. And we have eyes to see and ears to hear the violence and cries of the world. God wants us to really see others and listen to their stories. In that transaction we become Kingdom People.

Yes, we will sin along the way and make many mistakes in our serving. But Martin Luther once said something like, we are going to sin anyway, so sin boldly, and ask for forgiveness even more boldly. Today you are receiving grace in the words of forgiveness and in communion. You can go out into the world as a Kingdom Person.

So, what does the Lord require of you? But to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.