

“A Trinity Lifestyle”
Micah 6:1-8
Rev. Denise W. Ingram
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It seems that part of being a Christian is trying to figure out just what God wants from us. Most likely, we could recite the “do’s and don’ts” we learned as children, as well as the answers we have discerned through our teenage years and adulthood. Reformed theology affirms God acts first and everything else happens *in response* to God’s marvelous grace. We often speak about God’s call as a way of being and doing in our daily lives. God calls us and God expects something of us. What do you think God expects of you?

In today’s passage from the prophet Micah, we hear God does indeed have something for us to do in response to God’s grace. It involves having a right relationship with God, with all God’s other children, and with all life on God’s planet. God’s expectation gets right down to basics: justice, kindness, humbly walking with our God. Listen to God’s word given through the prophet Micah. Read 6:1-8.

The setting for Micah 6:1-8 is a courtroom. Micah describes God as both judge and prosecutor. God is charging Israel with a crime and taking them to court (v.1). God calls the mountains, the hills, the very foundations of the earth as witnesses for the prosecution. God’s accusation against Israel is that they are selfish people. Not only are they selfish—they have forgotten God’s generosity. They have forgotten how God has loved Israel, how God led them out of slavery and into the Promised Land. Rather than recite a laundry list of their sins, God pleads with them, as a parent to a child who ignores the parent’s love. “O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you?”

After they hear the accusation, the people as usual, miss the point: “God, what more could you possibly want from us? Do you want more sacrifices, more expensive livestock, a couple more zeros added to pledge amount? How about a thousand sheep? Should we sacrifice our firstborn children (now they are being insulting!) Just how religious can we be?” They are religious if being religious only means worshipping correctly. They might just as well have said, “But God, I am here every Sabbath that I can be. Don’t you hear me

reciting the prayer of confession and the affirmation of faith? Don't you see my pledge going in the offering plate before I say the Lord's Prayer? What more do you want?

The Israelites' idea of religion is so far from God's hopes for them. Israel has not grasped that religion is first and foremost based on their relationship to God and how that relationship changes the ways they relate to others. They think religion is a once a week worship obligation that in no way influences or impacts how they live their lives. Religion is completely compartmentalized from the rest of their lives. That practice is what has Micah so upset as he speaks God's word to them.

Micah is upset because in the world outside the temple doors, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. More than that: the rich are getting richer *because* the poor are getting poorer. Those who have land and power are using it to foreclose on smaller farmers and take away their plots of land. A small group of people are getting wealthier while the masses that had previously been able to support themselves are being driven into poverty. The circumstances of ancient Israel sound so similar to circumstances these days, don't they? While these corrupt practices are taking place in their community, Israel is in the middle of a revival some 700 years before Christ's birth. The pews are packed every Sabbath and giving is over budget for the first time in years. Israel, however, has become arrogant and uncompassionate, "worshipping" like nothing important is happening around them. The Israelites are "talking the talk" in worship while failing to "walk the walk" outside of it. There is a huge disconnect between their worship and how they are living their lives. Their worship is empty and their actions **enrage** God.

"What does God want?" the prophet asks. The answer for Israel is the same answer for us many centuries later. God wants us to **do justice**—to be a voice for oppressed persons, unprotected persons, widows, foreigners and every person treated as less than a child of God. To do justice is to redistribute power in the world so there is a level playing field for everyone. To do justice is to correct unjust systems that marginalize some for the enhancement of others. To do justice sometimes means simply speaking up.

A youth group, from another church – not our Fairmont youth—were on an urban mission trip. They were working in a community garden one day—pulling weeds, watering and fertilizing plants. Two teenage boys began making fun of a teenage girl in their group.

Their ridicule and verbal put downs continued all day unbeknownst to the adult advisors.

Later that night, the guys laughed telling their roommate the fun they had had making fun of this girl. Their roommate responded, "You guys are a bunch of jerks! No one likes to be made fun of. You shouldn't do that." Whether it was his words or the tone of disgust in his voice, it got their attention. First thing the next morning, the guys confessed to the youth pastor how they had treated the girl and their roommate's response. "Were we really jerks?" they asked. "Yes, you were acting like jerks" the pastor replied. They apologized to the girl and behaved better the rest of the trip. Their roommate was doing justice when he called them on their behavior, ensuring equal treatment of their female peer. God expects us to "do justice."

God also expects us to "love kindness." Scholars complain translating this word as "Kindness" is too weak and that the word, mercy, is more accurate. We are to love others like God loves us—by showing mercy. Is there a limit to when and where we are to show mercy?

At the Feb. 12 presbytery meeting, presbyters will be asked to vote on amendments to our church's Book of Order—understood to be our Presbyterian "rule" book. The proposed Amendment 10-A would change the current paragraph on ordination standards. Since 1977, the PCUSA has been arguing and debating ordination standards.

Eleven pastors and I met recently to discuss the pros and cons of this amendment. Twelve pastors trained to listen did a lousy job listening to each other because we all had our discussion points to make. My sense leaving the meeting was that we all wanted to be right and our wanting to be right deadlocked us. Married couples in therapy, deadlocked over an issue in their relationship, may be asked, "Do you want to be right or do you want to be in this relationship?" That question forces them to declare what is most important to them.

That same question posed to members of the PCUSA would force us to choose between being right or being in relationship. Could it be that whether we have the right answer is less important to God than whether we show mercy in reconciling the relationship? Could God desire mercy over one's God-given convictions? Is that what God wants? Is that what Micah says?

Such questions lend themselves to the last part of God's declaration—to walk humbly with God. Such questions move us toward God, acknowledging we need God's wisdom and guidance in finding answers and God's courage in living out those answers. Walking humbly with God means we submit our will to God's will.

What does God expect of you? He has told you, o mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of the People offered by Elder Linda Yoder (10:30 service)

“No one knows what today or tomorrow will bring. Only one thing is certain; God is always near, always ready to hear—and answer—our prayers.” - Norman Vincent Peale

Heavenly Father,

Embracing change can be a great challenge for us. We are comfortable doing what we know to be best for us, but sometimes life brings changes that are not wanted. Sometimes life brings changes that are dreaded, changes that give way to fear and anxiety.

We admit that fear is often our first response to challenges that come our way. Enable us to consciously choose to trust You with every detail of our lives. Strengthen in us the faith to leave the question marks of life in Your control so that we are confident to trust You to carry us through the uncertainty and sustain us with the peace that is beyond all understanding.

O God of compassion, bless us and those we love. Be with us, as well as with our families and friends. Help us understand that be drawing closer to you, we will be drawn closer to each other, embracing together the challenges we face, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.