

Sermon Notes - November 13, 2022

“Three Requirements of Us”

(Micah 6:6-8)

Today I am going to preach on the Old Testament prophet Micah and what he had to say, because I think it appeals to us today just as much as it did to the society in which he lived in that day. What you might not know about Micah was he was an Old Testament prophet; he was raised during the 8th century as God’s spokesman to the nation of Judah. The nation of Judah had betrayed God. They had broken covenant with God – the government had become corrupt, the people were doing everything that the world did – they were worshipping pagan gods and some of them were still trying to worship God, but they were just going through the motions – the judges were taking bribes, the government was corrupt, the people were forsaking God. They had broken covenant and God was upset with them.

Now, Micah spoke as a prophet for God. He stood up against the powerful landlords that exploited and took advantage of the poor farmers. He (as a farmer, too) knew what that was like; he spoke for them and wanted to see justice for them. But, he also was God’s spokesman to say to the people, “It’s time for you to turn back to God and to come back to him. Don’t forget what God has done for you. God is tired of all your rituals and going through the motions of being religious and Christian. God wants you to show your relationship to him by the way you live – your character and your ethics.” They weren’t doing that, and so in this passage, Micah says, “What does the Lord require of you? He has told you, O man, what is good. What does the Lord require of you -- but to do justice, to love mercy and kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

What does it mean to “do justice”? When we say that, it almost implies that we have “to do something” – that we are going to treat people fairly and justly – that we want to value all people who are creations of God and treat them the right way. God wanted his people to treat one another the way God wants us to treat one another, and they weren’t doing that. “Doing justice” meant to make right and fair what is wrong.

What does “justice” look like? Let me give you an example. One of the former US Presidents, Abraham Lincoln (who lived during the Civil War), was one time reported to have been in one of the cities in the south when slavery was going on, and it was right before he had become President. He had watched people being sold on the auction block like a head of cattle. One day, he was with one of his comrades and he turned, looked at him, and said, “You know, here’s a girl, twelve or thirteen years old who’s been stripped from her family, her friends, her village. She has been stripped of everything she knows, taken to another town, and she’s being sold on an auction block. Look at the fear and terror in her eyes and her face. She’s trembling.” He looked at his friend and said, “You know, this has to stop.” He was talking about the institution of slavery. Abraham Lincoln dedicated his life to the emancipation of slaves and to destroying the institution of slavery.

Some of you know the name Desmond Tutu. He’s deceased now, but he was the Archbishop of Cape Town in South Africa. What you might not know about him was when he was a teenager, he went to his pastor one Sunday after church. He said, “Pastor, I don’t understand why our people have to deal with so much poverty, hardship, and oppression. Why doesn’t God do something about it?” His Pastor, a very wise man, looked at him and said, “Desmond, he did. He created you.” Desmond Tutu took that as a challenge and it became a passion with him - to become a political activist for the fair treatment of all people in South Africa. He did that all of his life, and he later became the Archbishop of Cape Town in South Africa. He wanted justice for people; he wanted all people to be treated fairly.

You know, Jesus hated injustice. Throughout the scriptures, you read where Jesus stood up for people - whether they were children, widows, orphans, the poor, the sinner, etc. Whoever they were, he wanted all people to be valued and treated fairly and justly. God hates injustice. There’s a story that I think points it out a little more. It’s told about the time that Charles Dickens lived in England. During that time, it was not unusual for twelve, thirteen, or fourteen year old boys to have to work in the coal mines. Many of them were poor and they had dropped out of school and people would put them in the deep, dark, dangerous parts of the coal mine to work. They worked twelve to fourteen hours

per day. These little boys came from poor families – they didn’t have many worldly resources. The church that their families attended was very kind and generous to them. At Christmas and Thanksgiving, they always gave those families turkeys or ham and other food; they would bring presents for the kids; they would offer prayers -- I call that kindness and generosity. But, there were two men in that church who saw the injustice in these little boys having to work and not being able to be kids and finish their schooling. They became so compassionate about this injustice that they worked to bring about a law in the British Parliament and got it passed that made it illegal for kids that age to work in coal mines. Anyone that hired these young boys would be thrown into prison for trying to make them. That’s called justice.

God wants us to stand up and to speak up for those who are belittled or oppressed in any way. Wherever there’s oppression – politically, economically, racially, religiously – we’re to stand up and do our part. What does that look like? Sometimes it looks like standing up for somebody being belittled or bullied at school. I think I told you a few years ago about a class of nine confirmands I had at Trinity. There were nine kids in that class, and one night we’re sitting in the chapel talking, having a discussion about class, school, etc. Three of the kids gained enough courage to tell us that they were being bullied at school. Three of the nine were bullied at school, belittled, picked-on, and embarrassed. I was so proud of the rest of that confirmation group, because without me saying or prodding or anything, two of them spoke up and said, “If I’d been in your school, I would have taken up for you.” Two of them got up, walked over, and hugged all three of those other kids without me saying a thing. I am so proud of them. *Wherever there’s oppression, God wants us to speak up and stand up. Maybe it’s in voting – maybe it’s in speaking up for a senior adult who has no family and they need an advocate to be there for them between them and their doctor or social services – maybe it’s to speak up for a woman or a child who’s being abused or neglected – and we need to do our part and speak up.* Today, where is God calling us to do justice as individuals and as a church?

As Christians, Micah says, “We’re called to do justice.” And then, he goes on to say that we are to love mercy. Some scholars would say that we are to love kindness – we’re to show kindness. Most of us have

been recipients of somebody's kindness – whether it be in our family, a friendship, or a stranger. I think I told you about going through the Chic-fil-A line and I had ordered a milkshake. Whoever was in front of me paid for my ticket. I didn't know until I went to pay and they said, "God's blessings be with you." All I could say was, "Thank you, Lord." All of us have been the recipient of somebody's kindness. But, Jesus doesn't talk about just being kind to those who are kind to you – your family, your friends, your classmates, or your neighbors, etc. He's talking about being kind to ALL people, even those who give you the cold treatment and those who hurt and wrong you -- be merciful to them.

I heard a good definition of justice and mercy. If justice is getting fair treatment, then mercy is getting what we don't deserve. Isn't that what God gives us? The Apostle Paul said, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus was merciful to us. Do you remember when Jesus was on the cross and between thieves said, "If you're the Son of God, cast yourself down from here and us, too." The other thief said, "Leave him alone. He hasn't done anything wrong. Jesus, would you remember me when you come to your paradise?" Jesus looked at him that day and said, "Today you will be with me in paradise." That's mercy. That man didn't deserve it, but Jesus gave it to him, and he gives it to us every day of our lives.

Some of you have seen the play or the movie of the TV version of "Les Miserables." In that movie there is a man named Jean Valjean and he has been in prison. He's released from prison and he's having a hard time finding a job. The local Catholic priest offers him a night at his home. He will give him dinner and a place to stay for the night. They eat dinner and it gets late; they both go to their rooms and go to bed. Jean can't sleep. About halfway through the night, he is so restless that he gets up and starts walking through the house. He is used to stealing things. So, he goes through the priest's house and steals some silver candlesticks and utensils that he can sell or pawn for money. Halfway through the night, he leaves the priests' house with all that silver and he tries to pawn it for money. The French police catch him, find out the silver is from the priest's house, and take him and the silver back. The police told the priest, "We understand he took this silver from you. We caught him trying to sell it." The priest says, "No, he didn't steal it. I

gave it to him.” Wow. Jean Valjean’s eyes get big – he couldn’t believe it. The priest was taking up for him. The priest saw something good in him that he didn’t even see in himself before now. The police release him and leave. The priest tells him later: “Go and live your life better than you’ve done.” Jean Valjean took that as a challenge and went on to do that – to live better. He went on to take care of his sick sister and her children. He went on to become a better man until he died -- all because a priest was merciful to him. Sometimes we need somebody to be merciful to us.

So, today, who is it that we need to be kind to – merciful to – that’s hurt us or given us the cold treatment? The challenge is to keep being kind and keep being merciful.

And then, Micah says to them and to us: “Walk humbly with your God.” You know I used to think humility was what some people would say, “being a doormat.” – but it’s not! Humility is not just thinking less of yourself – it is thinking OF yourself less. It’s realizing that life is about God and others, and not ourselves. God is the source of who we are and how we’re to live for him. When I first thought of humility, I thought of a good example by Tom Selleck – (many of you know the hunk that was in “Magnum P.I.” years ago and is now in the TV series “Blue Bloods”). (I used to think he was good looking) Haha! He said that he often got full of himself and one day a journalist asked him, “Tom, how do you keep from thinking too much of yourself?” He said, “Well, every time I get tempted to think too much of myself, I remember a nice elderly couple with a camera in their hands who approached me on the streets of Honolulu. I struck a pose. I just knew they wanted my picture. But, the husband is shoving the camera at me saying, ‘No, picture of us! Picture of us!’ I got humbled really fast.”

Well, Jesus is talking about humility in the sense of submitting to God’s leadership -- getting so close in our relationship with him, that we realize that life is about that relationship with him and with others. And, as we grow in our relationship with him, it affects our relationship with others. We grow in mercy and kindness. We grow in love. We grow in doing justice and standing up for those who are oppressed. We grow our relationship with him by praying, Bible study, worship, and fellowshiping with other believers, etc. As we grow in our relationship

with God, we begin to ask like Jesus acted. We begin to reflect what he said and did.

Micah told the people of Judah, “God’s tired of you going through the motions in all your rituals. He wants to see a change in your character and your behavior and how you treat one another.” May we go forth this week and this year for God to help us to know the people to whom we need to be merciful to or be kind to. We can only do it through the power of God’s Spirit - not in our own strength. Who is the person or persons we can stand up for - this day, this week, on the job, at school, etc. that aren’t being treated fairly and justly? God has called us as Christians to have an impact in our world. May we go forth “to do justice, to love mercy (kindness), and to walk humbly with God.” Amen.