

**Sermon Notes – June 14, 2020**  
**“Three Things God Asks of Us”**  
**(Micah 6:8, Luke 18:1-8)**

I have three questions that I would like you to ponder as we go through the scriptures and the sermon today:

1. Do you treat others fairly?
2. Are you merciful with those who wrong you?
3. Are you growing in humility?

Today’s scripture lesson from Micah 6:8 says, “He has showed you, o man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you – to do justice, to love mercy (loving kindness), and to walk humbly with your God.”

Micah in the Old Testament was an 8<sup>th</sup> century prophet of God to the nation of Judah (the Southern Kingdom). He was also a farmer. Micah prophesied against the injustice and unfairness going on in Judah at the time – the courts were corrupt, the judges were taking bribes to hand-out unlawful accusations, the powerful landlords were exploiting and taking advantage of the poor farmers. Israel and Judah had broken covenant with God. They were going through the motions of religious activities, but it seemed to have no impact on the way they lived. They were not doing justice, being kind and merciful, or growing in their walk with God. God was upset with Judah and told Micah (God’s spoke-person) to tell the people. In essence, God doesn’t want your sacrifices and offerings of a calf, or rivers of oil, or a thousand rams for forgiveness of your sins. **God wants to see a change in your character and ethical conduct.** Micah said, “what does the Lord require of you? – to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

What does it mean “to do justice” (or as some Bible translations say – “to act justly”)? Well, it definitely implies that we **do something** – make right that which is wrong; treat ALL people rightly, fairly, justly; treat ALL people as created in God’s image and as you want to be treated.

Abraham Lincoln, one of our former US presidents, tells of walking down a street in a city in the South one day and seeing a little young black girl (12 to 14 years of age) standing on an auction block like a head of cattle. She had been stripped away from her family and friends. She had immense fear and terror in her eyes. Abraham Lincoln looked at his comrade that day and said, "this has to stop," and he was referring to slavery. Abraham Lincoln dedicated his life to the destruction of slavery - that's doing something - doing justice.

There's another story I want to share about doing justice - in the 1800's it was not unusual in England to find poor boys (ages 12-14) working deep in coal mines. These kids dropped out of school and worked 12-14 hours a day in the mines. These kids and their families were poor and had little of the world's resources. At Thanksgiving and Christmas, the church where these families attended, would help them with food, clothing, gifts, and prayers - that is what we call kindness - helping someone in need. But, two men in the church who were in the British Parliament felt great compassion for these poor boys and thought they were suffering from injustice and wanted to do something. They wanted these boys to be able to go to school and just be kids for a while longer; so, they pushed a law through Parliament making it illegal for anyone to work boys this age in the coal mines. That is justice - making something right and fair that is wrong.

Three or four years ago, I taught a youth confirmation class of nine teenagers. In that class were three teens who admitted to being bullied at school - they were demeaned, belittled, and embarrassed in front of other teens - not only by the bully's words, but their actions. When these three confirmands shared in class about this bullying, I was so proud of the rest of the confirmands. On their own, before I said anything, they got up, hugged those three youth, and said, "if I were at your school, I'd stand up for you."

God hates injustice. Jesus, throughout the scriptures, stood up for the poor, the women, the children and sinners - anyone mistreated or not treated as a person. We are all created in God's image. Jesus said, "Love

your neighbor as your yourself.” Wherever there is oppression - whether it be political, economic, racial, or bullying - we are to stand up or speak up.

Many of you know or have heard the name, Desmond Tutu - he was a political activist for fair treatment of all people and the Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa. When Desmond Tutu was a young teenager he went to see his pastor and said, “I don’t understand why our people have to experience so much poverty, hardship, and oppression. Why doesn’t God do something about it?” His wise pastor said, “He did. He created you.” And Desmond Tutu went on as a young man to stand up for the equal rights of people in Africa and became the Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa. He became the answer to his own question.

I think what that wise pastor was saying to Desmond Tutu is, “**we are to be God’s hands, feet, and voice in the world.**” *We are to stand up or speak up whenever we see people being bullied or treated unfairly.*

**Micah, the prophet, went on to say that God requires us “to love mercy.”** Some scholars say, “to love kindness.” If justice is getting what we deserve (fair treatment), mercy is getting what we don’t deserve. Isn’t that what God has given to each of us - mercy? The scriptures say, “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” A Sunday School teacher was trying to teach fourth and fifth grade boys about “grace” (or mercy) one day and they just were misbehaving and not paying attention. All of a sudden, she slammed her hands on the table and said, “Boys, grace is what you get when you don’t deserve it” - and she was merciful to them.

Some of you have seen the play or TV version of, “Les Miserables.” In the story, a man named Jean VaJean has been released from prison, but is having a hard time finding a job. He is invited to have dinner and spend the night with the Catholic priest. Halfway through the night, Jean can’t sleep and he gets up, steals some silver candlesticks and utensils from the priest and leaves. He tries to pawn the candlesticks for money and gets arrested by the French police. They take Jean and the candlesticks to the home of the priest. When the police tell the priest that Jean had

stolen from him, the priest says, “Oh no.. I gave these to him.” So, the police release Jean in the presence of the priest. Jean cannot believe the priest showed mercy and let him go. The priest told him to go and live better. The priest knew that Jean needed a new start in life, and because the priest could see something good in him, Jean VaJean went on to live his life as a better man than he had been. The priest showed him mercy; he gave Jean what he didn’t deserve or earn.

When Jesus was on the cross, there were two thieves hung on crosses on either side of him. You remember how one said, “if you’re the Son of God, get yourself down from this cross and us, too.” The other thief in essence said, “Leave Jesus alone. He’s done nothing to deserve this. Jesus, remember me when you come into your paradise.” Jesus said to that thief, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.” – Jesus gave mercy – what the thief didn’t deserve. Mercy is what Jesus gives to us everyday. Is it easy to be kind to someone who has hurt us? No! But, as we grow in our relationship to God, God’s Spirit strengthens us and empowers us to do those things that don’t come so natural for us humans. It’s not in our strength, but in God’s.

**Micah also says in this passage of scripture that God wants us to walk humbly with him.** When I think of humility, I remember something actor Tom Selleck (of the TV show “Blue Bloods”) said, “When I get full of myself, I always remember a nice elderly couple who one day approached me with a camera on the streets of Honolulu. When I struck a pose (thinking they wanted my picture), the husband pushed the camera in my hands and said, ‘Oh no. We want you to take a picture of us.’” They didn’t even recognize Tom Selleck was a well-known movie celebrity.

Well, I think when Micah said, “we are to walk humbly with God” that he meant we are to recognize that life is about God and one another, not us. We are to grow so close in our daily relationship with God – through prayer, Bible study, worship, and fellowship with other believers – that we become sensitized to the things of God. We begin to see people as God sees them, to act as God acts, and to allow our hearts to be broken by the things that break God’s heart. As we grow in our daily walk, recognizing

and accepting our submission to Almighty God, **our character and ethical conduct will be molded and shaped, like that of Christ and will be pleasing to God.**

What Micah, as God's spokesman, was saying to the people of Judah (and to us) was that God didn't want rituals that became an end in itself; *God wants a relationship with us - one that is evidenced by our character and ethical behavior.*

What does God require of us? - to do justice, to love (show mercy), and to walk humbly with God. So I conclude with these three questions:

1. **Do you treat others fairly?** Are you growing in standing up or speaking up for those mistreated? Do you remember that all people are God's and created in His image?
2. **Are you merciful with those who wrong you?** Are you kind to strangers and those different from you? Can you treat with kindness even someone who has hurt you?
3. **Are you growing in humility (and submission to God's control in your life)?** Are you growing more Christ-like in your attitudes and actions towards others?

I don't know about you, but God is still hard at work on me. May God continue to mold and shape you and me into persons that honor him with our character and ethical conduct. Amen.