

Sermon 011016 Life
Scripture Micah 6: 1-8
Sermon Title- To Life!

We have today the famous passage Micah 6: 8 that reads, “And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.” This might be considered a piece of advice on how best to live.

Now, let’s face it, there are plenty of ways to get advice on how to live. If you are on email, you have received thousands of life advice emails and some of them are actually good. There is advice on health, diet, exercise, spiritual well being, emotional well being, financial well-being, how to be a good friend, how to be organized, how to be happy, how to be faithful, honest, kind, thin and on and on. Then, you’ve got social media, self-help books, bumper stickers, fortune cookies, and if you’ve ever had an uncle, you’ve gotten plenty of advice.

One source of advice that is a favorite of mine is a little book called, *Tuesdays With Morrie*. It is an account of a Brandeis University graduate who goes back on Tuesdays for a period to visit his favorite professor who is dying. Morrie the professor, among other things, has this to say: So many people walk around with a meaningless life. They seem half-asleep, even when they are busy doing things they think are important. This is because they are chasing the wrong things. The way you get meaning into

your life is devoting yourself to loving others, devoting yourself to your community, and devoting yourself to creating something.

I think of this advice from Morrie when I read the advice from Micah that says to ‘act justly and to love mercy.’ These are summons to human connections. It is through connecting with other people that we bring life into existence. You cannot become fully human, and you certainly cannot live the life of a Christian all by yourself. If you cut yourself off from people, judge them, reject them, withdraw from them, plot to use them, but never really connect with them, you will lead one sad and lonely life.

Connecting with others begins by devoting yourself to loving others, being just, and merciful.

The great Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber was asked the question that clergy are sometimes asked, “Where is God?” Buber was wise enough to avoid the clichés, “God is everywhere” or “God is found in synagogues and churches.” Buber said, “God is found in relationships.” We realize our own humanity and we become convinced that God is real, when we connect with other people.

Our passage from Micah to ‘act justly, and to love mercy’ and Morrie’s call to be devoted to loving and Buber’s call to find God in relationships are all basically saying that if you want to live

fully, love fully. This is a theme of many a song. Frank Sinatra sings a favorite love song of mine best, I believe. It is called:

ALL THE WAY

(singing)

Taller than the tallest tree is,

That's how it's got to feel.

Deeper than the deep blue sea is,

That's how deep it goes to be real...

It is about going beyond your comfort zone. To love all the way, is to live all the way. Now, there are risks for sure...

heartbreak, disappointment, and loss. But to love and to be loved makes your whole world different. Colors are brighter. Sunshine is warmer. To love and to be loved validates our lives, because human beings are not meant to live in isolation. We are meant to share our lives with others. When we talk in church about loving each other in Christ, we are saying that the love is great, even if you don't like someone that much. To love greatly is sometimes difficult.

That's part of the great challenge to love and live fully. Life deals us hard blows. That's the way it is, my friends, yes sir ree Bob. People are taken from us and the heart breaks. How can grief and disappointment be a call to live life fully? Because death and the fear of death teaches us how precious life is. How often do

we receive a phone call to learn that someone that we love or care about is ill or receives a bad biopsy report? Or maybe it is you that gets the bad report. In our busyness and preoccupations we are suddenly jarred by the realization of how precious each day is.

It is only because life is precious that death is so tragic. Otherwise, death would have no impact on us. The message that cries to us at the empty seats at holiday gatherings is that life is too short to be petty, life is too precious to be squandered, life is too fragile to be handled thoughtlessly. The advice is clear. Cherish each day that you have. Take no day for granted. Don't put off the good deed, the kind word, the attempt at reconciliation. By God, love fully and live fully.

I will be turning 65 this year. One of the saddest things that I have learned in my time in this world is how hard it is to celebrate. Sure, we know how to enjoy ourselves, relax, have some laughs, and have fun. But so few of us know how to elevate it to the experience of joy. Joy is the kind of feeling that makes life worthwhile. We feel empty and cheated when we can't achieve it.

I'd like to play on my trusty iPod part of a song that for me captures the energy, spirit, and joy of celebration. It is from the great musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*. Tevye has just given his consent for his daughter to marry Lazar Wolff and the two men have a celebratory drink and sing the song:

To Life!

Drink L'Chaim to life,

To life, L'Chaim

L'Chaim, l'chaim, to life!

Life has a way of confusing us,

Blessing and bruising us,

Drink L'Chaim to life!

God would like us to be joyful,

Even when our hearts are panting on the floor.

How much more can we be joyful

Even when we have something to be joyful for?

To life, to life, L'Chaim!

I believe the central religious emotion is gratefulness. Not the ‘thank you’ that we mumble when someone holds a door for us, but the core sense of wonder and gratitude that overwhelms us in the moment of realization that we have been blessed by God. Gratefulness has holiness in it. That is what joy and celebration are about. The song says that God wants us to be joyful. It is the joy of life, love of life, connectedness with others, and gratefulness to God that brings us to life. That is when we come to the third part of Micah’s call to “act justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” Joy, celebration, and gratefulness are experienced in the humble realization that God blesses us. That is when we can sing, with abandon, “To Life!”

To walk humbly with your God is to proclaim the sovereignty of God. It is the humble gratefulness that we have as

we bow down to the Creator, The Redeemer, and the Comforter. It is to be awed before the glory of God.

Often, that is hard to do. We look out at this world and it doesn't look like God is in charge of it. We see hurricanes and earthquakes and tidal waves. We see disease and death, crime, and poverty. We see war and terrorism. We learn about crazed gunmen shooting as many innocent people as they can before they themselves are stopped.

Yet behind the headlines, we see goodness displayed every day in the world and in our lives. We cherish the light instead of cursing the darkness. A woman asked me last summer a question. She asked, "How can I persuade my 9-year-old son to believe in God?" I told her, "If you'll pardon my saying so, that is the wrong question. The issue is not believing in God. You can't talk someone into believing. The question is how to teach your child to recognize God in his life. When he does something wrong and he is caught then forgiven, he has met God, who teaches us to love and forgive. When he has the experience of seeing beauty in the world, to have the wonder of gazing at a star lit night; he is humbled before God. When he loves and knows that he is loved is to experience God."

When we learn to recognize God in the world, we learn to look at the world and see God's fingerprints all over it. That is

when we learn to look within ourselves and sense the Spirit of God moving us to be good, to be generous to be compassionate. Then we live the words from Micah, “And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.” (6: 8)

That is when we know that we are truly alive and we can celebrate life. My prayer for all of us is that God reminds us to live. That God reminds us of what it is really like to be alive. That God reminds us that connections with each other reveal God in the world. That we learn to love each other fully. That we learn to love and live all the way. That we have the strength and serenity to survive the worst that the world can bring, and see the face of God wherever we turn in the world. That each day that we are here on this blessed earth, our hearts will sing, “To Life!” AMEN