

SERMON DELIVERED AT AUBURN UMC, AUBURN, MICHIGAN

6th Sunday after Epiphany
Year A

Duane M. Harris

February 12, 2017

Text: Micah 6:1-8

Title: “Fresh Start: Overcoming SAD--Spiritual Affective Disorder. Make My Day”

Over the years I’ve told her joke over and over again. Paula Poundstone asked, “Why are adults always asking kids what they want to be when they grow up?They’re looking for ideas.” We ask a lot of questions throughout our lives. Some of them are funny, but many of them seek serious answers. For most of us, life is a journey filled with a lot of questions and wonder. Sometimes, in fact, we have more questions than answers.

I had a recent email dialogue with one young adult who expressed frustration about all the greed, corruption and injustices in the world, wondering...

“if God wants things to stay the way they are...? People become indolent, focused on unimportant distractions while injustice, corruption, greed and cruelty are the name of the game. I am so tired of it.”

There could be no better introduction to the thoughts of the prophet Micah than this young adult’s email. What we are presented with in Micah 6 is a courtroom scene. God has a serious problem with the people of Israel. God is tired of the way things are, and so the people of Israel are called to the witness stand with the mountains and the foundations of the earth listening in as witnesses to this line of questioning from God.

6 Hear what the Lord says:
Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.
2 Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord,
and you enduring foundations of the earth;
for the Lord has a controversy with his people,
and he will contend with Israel.
3 “O my people, what have I done to you?
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!
4 For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;

and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.

5 O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.”

6 [the people answer]: “With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

8 [and now the prophet speaks]: He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Like my young emailing friend, God is tired of the way people are acting and living in the nation of Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel had already been swallowed up by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Jerusalem itself, the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah had only been saved from the same fate because King Hezekiah paid off the invaders. At one time they had been a great nation during the reigns of David and Solomon but when Solomon died it fell apart when the nation was divided in two and then things got worse. The tiny nation of Judah had gone off the rails. The people turning away and forgetting what they’ve already received. Earlier in the book, the offenses against God are outlined plainly.

- The powerful “covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away”(2:2)
- They “tear the skin off my people” (3:2)
- They send violence on the poor (3:5)
- The political leaders take bribes, and the religious leaders sell out for money (3:11). They might pray for you if you spotted them a \$20.

God is angry with their behavior, their treatment of the vulnerable, and their unjust practices toward those with less power. They oppress the poor; there is corruption in its courts, dishonest economic practices, false prophets and greedy priests, a loss of order, all of which betray a rejection of God’s justice and commandments.

So God has a complaint, and Micah gives voice to God’s charge against the people. In chapter 6 God asks what God has done that would lead them to separate themselves from God? Because the way they are living indicates they have strayed from God. Remember what I’ve done, God asks?

...I brought you up from the land of Egypt,

and redeemed you from the house of slavery;
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.

“I even sent a foreigner—Balaam—to bless you when the King of Moab called for him to curse you. Four oracles of blessing he offered you because he listened to me and not his king. I have been with you from the beginning. What have I done that would cause you to turn from me?”
God wanted to know.

The people answer with a question of their own: “With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high? What will it take, Lord, to please you? Is it burnt offerings, calves a year old or thousands of rams? Is it an abundance of oil we can give you as a ritual offering? If these things aren’t enough what about giving you that which is most valuable, that which the pagans sacrifice to their gods: our first born? Will that be enough?”

“What will it take to please you? More Bible study? Writing a bigger check for the offering plate? Singing more praise songs? Taking holy communion more often? Will it please you if we build a new worship space, fill all our seats? Will you be pleased if we show you that we are bigger, better, faster and stronger? Is that the kind of church you bless? Is it this kind of greatness you are after? What do you want from us?”

With God’s judgment, there is always a vision of hope. God never leaves the people with harsh judgment without tempering it with hope for the future. And so the prophet makes it very plain:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

What does the Lord desire? God has already told you what is GOOD: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. It’s been God’s desire all along from the very beginning when God saw everything and called it GOOD.

I. Do Justice

The charge against the nation was that they neglected the poor and those who were oppressed. God calls us to be a voice for people who are oppressed, for unprotected persons, for those treated as less than God’s children. It means righting of relationships and the application of fairness to all things.

Some of you are aware that in response to a phone call I received from Kris Wise a few weeks ago, we held a meeting here on Wed. night to address the problem of drugs in this community. Three of Kris’s friends died in the last 4 months from drug overdoses, and like the first young adult who emailed me this week, Kris and his life, Liz, and mother Tracy are so tired of this happening. So we had a meeting and invited anyone who wanted to come to attend. Room 6 was packed and we had a great initial gathering, a substantive conversation about how this ad hoc group might address the matter of young people losing their lives to substance abuse. One of the remarks I heard repeated several times that night is that when people think of

someone using drugs, they think “bad person! Bad person! Lock ‘em up!” Even when it’s a teenager in high school! Instead we need to change the thinking that these are people who need help, love, support, strong guidance. If the problem is on-going and habitual, they need treatment because addiction is proven to be a disease. When I think of doing justice and restoring balance to relationships I think—among other things--of changing my attitude when it comes to people suffering from addiction.

III. Walk Humbly with Your God

To walk humbly with God is to be open to the presence of God wherever we are. It is recognizing that as it says in the book of Acts that “...in him we live and move and have our being.” Like a fish in the water we are “in God”. Our lives depend on God whether we recognize it or not. I imagine a fish cannot really see the water and yet it cannot survive outside of it.

So it is with God. For us to walk humbly with God is to recognize that we live in the Spirit, that we are not the Spirit but live within the Spirit. The charge is to be open to God’s presence and power wherever we are and to be open to the One who seeks a relationship with us.

II. Love Kindness

We are called not just be kind—which can also be translated as mercy or compassion—but we are called to love it. Not just be kind but to love being kind. Not merely the exercise of mercy, but the love of mercy. Not merely the doing of a kind act, but the appreciation of the deed. Not merely saying the helpful word, but meaning what we say.

This week the spiritual homework exercise has to do with kindness. Today begins Random Acts of Kindness week and so we have a video clip to share about this.

(Show video)

The children at their last “Make a Difference Day” have done some work for us. They have created opportunities for you to be kind this week. In fellowship hall you may have noticed some trees with hearts on them. The hearts contain some random acts of kindness to be done during this week. We are asking you to take several of them and carry them out throughout the week. If you can do it without being noticed, we’d also like you to take a photo of some part of the act and then email them to Jenn in the office and she’ll put together a collage of all the acts to be shared next week.

Jesus came in ways that clearly demonstrated the word of the Lord given to Micah: do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. This week, don’t just think about these things but act so that the world may know the Lord of Love is alive.