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**East Liberty Presbyterian Church**  
**July 1, 2012**

**“O Church, What Does the Lord Require of You”**

**Micah 6:6-8**

*Read the scripture online (NSRV): <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=208602458>*

Sparks of insight are always triggered by something. Something precedes every flash of inspiration. For example, a group in our church watched the documentary [Race: The Power of an Illusion](#). We learned how race is a sociological category, not a biological fact. There are far more genetic differences between people considered to be of the same race than there are between people who check different boxes under race on the census form. Which leads me to ask, how would I live differently if race truly didn't matter, if race wasn't a factor in so many daily interactions?

A different example. I recently read a speech given several years ago by Václav Havel, the former Czech president. In it he said this: “Today we live in a world with a single global civilization.” At first that didn't make sense. But then I thought about how bound together we are with every other nation on this planet. We are intertwined through economics and politics and shared information. We have come to understand that the Greek monetary crisis and China's undervalued currency, the fiscal policies of Germany or the uprisings in Syria directly affect us here in America, in Pittsburgh, in East Liberty. One suicide bomber from an obscure village in Yemen can impact millions of lives today. Which leads me to ask, how would I live if geography and national borders truly didn't matter, if my priorities were shaped by the needs of my global family?

Maybe insight comes from something far more mundane. A pudgy American named Matt Harding, who was a particularly bad dancer, left a boring job in the videogame industry in Los Angeles to follow some friends to a new job in Australia. When that new job was just more of the same old stuff in a different time zone, Matt quit his job and planned to return home after doing some traveling along the way. One day, while somewhere in the world in front of some famous national monument, a friend said, “Stand over there and do that dance you do. We'll send it back to your girlfriend, Melissa.” Which led to a couple of videos of Matt dancing badly all over the world; videos that went viral on YouTube with millions of views: 17 million for a 2006 video; 43 million for a video from 2008; and already 2½ million for the new video that only came out 10 days ago. People smiled at their laptop screens to see Matt dance with children from around the world. Suddenly we saw other people as being just like ourselves: women in Syria, a place so lacking in freedom that their faces had to be blurred for safety's sake, but women dancing nonetheless; young boys in Iraq, not holding guns but imitating silly robotic dance moves; crowds in Pyongyang behind North Korea's secretive national curtain, crowds of enemies such as in Karachi and India, Jerusalem and Gaza; yet crowds dancing to the same spirit. Which leads me to ask how would we



live if we could see the world as God sees it, as God longs for us to see it, beyond the categories of fear and politics and religion that for far too long have kept us divided?

Suddenly a hand is raised in the back of the room, persistently waving, hoping to answer my question. When acknowledged, a pious Presby-Baptist-Episcopo-Pentecostal-Christian says, “The best way to live as if race and geography and history don’t matter is to make everyone a follower of Jesus. We should take to heart the Great Commission, Matthew 28:19: *Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*” Smiling confidently, the person sits down believing they have nailed the pop quiz. Except that their answer was wrong. Really wrong.

In the fullness of time, the good news of Jesus Christ came into our world. At some point we began treating it like a commodity, as something that some possessed and others did not possess. Those who possessed it read their scripture and decided that they needed to go out and share this possession with others, and make disciples of all nations. In 1792 a Baptist minister, William Carey, published a pamphlet explaining why we should take the gospel of Christ into all the world. Soon missionary societies sprang up to convert the heathen, the natives, the lost souls in distant lands. The good news of Christ was reduced to a few basic ideas, which some possessed and others hopefully accepted through conversion. When Christians no longer wanted to travel to Asia and Africa, evangelists from Billy Sunday to Billy Graham exhorted people to convert people near at home. Recently, a special group worked to ensure that the gospel of Christ had been preached to everyone in the world by the year 2000. In 2001, they disbanded because by their own reckoning, over 80% of all people had access to the bible in their own language, and as much as 95% of the world’s population now had some access to scriptures, Christian broadcasts, films and other materials.

Therefore, I have a special message for you on this, the first of July, year of our Lord 2012. Hear ye, hear ye: As of this point, the gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached to everyone on earth. So knock it off! Of course, some will doubt this pronouncement. They will be quick to show charts of Polynesian islands and mountain-dwelling tribes that haven’t received the gospel from our sanctified lips. I’m sorry; it’s simply time to stop. Some of you, O church, have done exceptionally fine work: caring, compassionate, life-giving ministry. Thank you. Some of you, O church, have been horrible: one denomination fighting against another, oppressing women, inciting violence, abusing children, turning the gospel into a pawn in your own political and economic games. Cut it out! The Great Commission as we’ve interpreted it for so long is now officially over.

My sincere hope is this momentous pronouncement will cause our fragmented Christian family to stop everything for a while, long enough for someone else to raise their hand and quietly ask the important question, “What are we supposed to do now?” If race truly isn’t a real factor in life, then how should we live together? If geography means nothing in the eyes of God, then how should we live together? If we are a single, global



civilization, and we are willing to set down our bibles and religious tracts and Jesus films and careful charts of believers vs. non-believers for just a moment, then how should we live together?

Once the evangelical commotion of the modern church is turned down for a moment, the wisdom of other people of faith can be heard again. Mahatma Gandhi once said: *I told the missionaries to refrain from telling India about Christ, and merely live the life set before them by the Sermon on the Mount.* India then, instead of suspecting them, would have appreciated and directly profited from their presence. Malcolm X once said: *Don't condemn a person who has a dirty glass of water. Just show them the clean glass of water that you have. When they inspect it, you won't have to say that yours is better.*

Once the evangelical commotion of the New Testament is turned down for a moment, the wisdom of our foundational faith can be heard again. Micah 6: *O mortals, God has told you what is good: To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.* In Micah's day, things were falling apart. The Assyrians had conquered the old Northern Kingdom of Israel and turned Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom into indentured servants, pawns on a violent geo-political chessboard. The old ways of living off the land were rapidly disappearing as people moved to the cities for safety and business success. But things were falling apart: Micah cried out: *You people are coveting one another's fields and foreclosing on houses (2:2); you take bribes and declare wars and violate the vulnerable, the poor, and the elderly.* Sound familiar? Then Micah prayed to the Lord: *What now? What should I bring you? Burnt offerings, young calves, thousands of rams, rivers of oil, my firstborn child?* Micah offered an escalating scale of commodities seeking to buy off the Lord. Why not? That seemed to be what other people did with their gods. But God doesn't want stuff. God never has. God wants us: us living together, working together, faithful together. God doesn't want commodities; God wants covenants.

Hopefully a new insight can be triggered for you today as you imagine, what if the gospel truly has been preached to all the world; and then you ask yourself "What do I do now?" Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), what do we do now? I am quite sure that there is no biblical advice telling us to form non-geographic, clusters of like-minded Presbyterians. I don't recall anything biblical about schism and further dividing our fractured church by creating new, flavor of the month denominations that will make everyone happy because everyone inside their walls believes all the same things. That's nonsense.

Micah reminds us mortals that we already know what comes next for the people of God. What comes next is "doing justice." Justice means that you daily walk in two pairs of shoes: your own shoes and your neighbors' shoes. Justice means balancing personal goods with the common good. It is much less about an evangelism anxious to teach doctrines and more about reconciliation that allows us to stand on a common foundation as we talk about things that matter, like faith and life and yes, church doctrinal beliefs. If God can create such a diverse world, isn't it time the church mirrored God's wisdom?



Micah calls us to do *hesed*—that is the Hebrew word—to do “loving-kindness.” We are to act lovingly in ways that are loyal, dependable, steady in good times and bad. We are to work compassionately so that all survive even as we survive. *Hesed* redistributes power, refocuses priorities, and by grace redeems us all. *Hesed* believes that nothing we do is ever lost; rather, it all becomes part of God’s eternal memory where it is ultimately judged. *Hesed* takes that fact quite seriously.

Lastly, Micah ends with the great phrase *halacha*: walk humbly, walk ethically, walk circumspect, careful, alert. Walk with holy reverence across the planet, and smile when at times you meet people like Matt Harding and he invites you to dance. Open up the doors of the church, for God’s sake. Get up and move, for it is only as you walk around that you can see who is sharing the space with you here on God’s good earth. It is in walking around that you will travel your own Emmaus road, and your heart will burn as scripture finally comes alive and makes sense. It is in walking around that conversations can happen in which Jesus can finally be named, and described, mutually shared, mutually worshiped. And on that day, the heavens rejoice for the gospel has been first lived and then proclaimed.

God has told you, O mortal, what is good: do justice, do *hesed*—loving-kindness; do *halacha*—walking humbly with your God. Everything else follows from that. Everything. Thanks be to God.

AMEN

