

Sunday, July 12, 2020 | Journey and Summer worship services**TEXT: [Micah 6:6–8](#)****TITLE: Do. Love. Walk.***By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy*

Once again, God had had enough. God's covenant people were not living as they were created and called to be. So, God engages the prophet Micah to issue a lawsuit against the people of Israel. In the urban vernacular, God's people had caught a case. God places them on trial and enlists mountains, hilltops, and the foundation of the earth as jurors. God's covenant people, most especially the religious elites' actions and behaviors were not corresponding to their religious practices or in line with the ethical obedience that was due to God. Their treatment of others was unethical, antithetical, unkind, and unloving. The people were guilty of "talking loud and saying nothing." They were "talking the talk, but not walking the walk."

Now, the Israelites were adept at exhibiting the cultic religious practices of their day. They, like us were versed in liturgy. However, their worship was empty, hollow, of no earthly good, because what good is it to experience a mountain top worship experience and then go out into the city square, in our workplaces, and homes exhibiting ethics and behaviors that don't reflect that which we proclaim and promulgate in our worship. What good are mountaintop, worship experiences when we do not live them out when we are down on the ground?

Earlier, Dr. Ed read God's justification for bringing the case against the covenant people, recalling God's goodness, grace and mercy. The people are reminded of how God brought them out of bondage in Egypt; provided the leadership of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam during their wilderness experience; reversed the King of Moab's plans to have them cursed by Balaam the seer, who blessed them instead; and gave them Joshua, who led them over the Jordan from their wilderness experience in Shittim into the promised land in Gilgal. God had been good to the people of Israel.

We often forget God's goodness towards us—we forget that God has and continues to provide for us during economic downturns. We forget that during this time of global pandemic, death, illness, separation, and isolation, God continues to provide opportunities for us to come together virtually and is yet keeping us. We forget that during this time of government ineptitude, lawlessness, and pageantry, God is not mocked and whatsoever is sown will eventually be harvested. We forget that God does not return evil for evil, but instead blesses us that we might be a blessing. God has been good to us—better than we deserve or warrant. And we forget that even when death, financial or personal upheaval, joblessness, the loss of relationships or illness come, because those are real-life human conditions, God is yet with us, comforting, providing ways out of no ways, opening doors that we do not see, unsealing windows that are nailed shut, and yes, even sometimes enacting miracles that defy explanation.

And what does God require of Israel and what does God require of us?

Israel suggested defense was that they would come before God with burnt offerings of year-old calves; hyperbolically offering thousands of rams and tens of thousands of rivers of oil. The people of Israel went so far as to suggest that, if it would please God, they were willing to offer their firstborn for their transgressions. You might say that offer is analogous to us offering up the security of others to suit our own outcomes and desires.

It never occurred or occurs to the people of God, that God is not concerned with their or our expressions of religiosity and piety. God is not focused on optics, what their lives looked like on the surface. God is focused on substance, the conditions of our hearts, our soul's purpose, and our practices towards others. What were they doing, how were they loving, with whom were they walking. What we are doing, how we are loving, with whom we are walking.

For more than two years, our Facing Systemic Racism team has been offering opportunities for the us to come together, to educate ourselves and confront the implicit and complicit biases and racism that yet runs rampant in our country, homes, churches, schools, policing, and the practice of medicine. The list is exhausting and exhaustive. In almost every area of life, people of color's outcomes are unequal and inequitable. Covid-19 brought that undeniable fact front and center. According to the CDC and medical professionals, there are stark inequalities in Covid-19 outcomes for Native Americans, Latinx/Hispanic and Black or African American people.

People of color are dying at greater rates and percentages due to Covid-19, for a variety of reasons, and they are the most likely to work in jobs that have either been eliminated or present greater exposure to the virus and are most likely to lose their financial livelihood and security. We as a country and a people are not doing, loving, or walking with our siblings of color. And truth be told, never have!

God was deeply disappointed in God's covenant people, as they failed to create and live into a just community where the bound were liberated, captives were freed, where the least of these were treated with equitably, and where all things were shared in common. Quite the contrary, in earlier chapters of Micah, God specifies that the powerful have coveted and seized fields and taken away houses that belong to others (2:2); they have sent violence upon the poor (3:5); the political leaders have taken bribes, and the religious leaders have sold out for money (3:11). The people of God had forgotten or chosen to ignore their history, their responsibility and what is the appropriate response to God and to others.

Siblings in Christ, God is more interested in how we live our everyday lives, and how we walk in the world than how well we excel in religious practices of piety, ritual, and ceremony. Amos, another prophet sent by God to convict a wayward people declared that God hates superficial efforts of piety, if those efforts are not accompanied by lives committed to justice and righteousness ([Amos 5:21–24](#)). God sent Micah to testify to and remind the people that the appropriate response to God was and remains, to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God.

Justice is something that we do, it must be done. It is not enough for us to complain about injustice, participate in vigils, make signs, shout platitudes. Doing justice goes beyond expressing Black Lives Matters or saying the names of individuals whose lives have been taken by those sworn to protect and serve, or studying the inequities in income, healthcare, housing, and education. Doing justice is dynamic. Doing justice calls on God's people to work for fairness, equity, and equality especially for the weak, powerless, disenfranchised, and people without agency who are exploited by others. Jesus said the poor will be with us always, but he did not say we should keep a boot on their necks or work to keep them in that position. Quite the contrary. Jesus fed the hungry, released the captives, walked with the outcast, and restored all of us to right relationship with God by his death and resurrection.

Loving kindness or mercy is the biblical concept of *hesed*. This concept and term is difficult to fully define or convey in the English language. *Hesed* describes elements of God's perfect relationship with humanity, as well as that which we should strive for in our relationships with one another. Loving kindness, or *hesed* is true and pure, unadulterated love, loyalty and faithfulness in covenant relationships that are not maintained out of obligation, duty, or fear of punishment, but out of deep, unconditional, sometimes unreciprocated love. *Hesed*, loving kindness or mercy perfectly describes God's relationship with humanity and creation—we do not deserve it, we cannot earn it, and God is not obligated to show it, but God does, because God is love. We are to love one another as we, or better than we love ourselves.

Walking humbly denotes and connotes walking circumspectly, carefully, purposefully in the world. Enlisting God to order our steps, to be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths; to lead and direct and guide us towards the direction of righteousness, faithfulness, goodness, grace, and mercy. When we walk humbly, we go beyond leaning unto our own understanding, we go beyond walking in the direction that we have mapped out, we go beyond what seems to add up or makes sense in our estimation, and to press beyond that which we can see, hear, feel, or imagine; and, to seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness, that all the other things we seek might be added unto us. To walk with God as our constant life's companion that we might be transformed by God's will.

One commentator sums up this passage in Micah stating: "the key verses from Micah are about life-style, one's total outlook on life, and one's ethical values. They reject the simplistic notion that there is one thing Israel can do, ritually or otherwise, to make things right between God and the people." (Daniel J. Simundson, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Volume 5*, Abingdon Press, Nashville: 2015, 725)

In the economy of God, things very often do not add up or seem right; one plus one plus one does not add up to three, but three in one. In the economy of God, enslaved, slaughtered, and disenfranchised people are not decimated, but overcome and thrive despite their circumstances and history. In the economy of God, an ordinary man who dies on the street of a city with a knee pressing the breath of life out of him, breathes

new life into a movement of justice, equality, equity, and peace. In the economy of God, nothing can separate us from the love of God, not pandemics, stay at home orders, or economic insecurity, for the Spirit of God keeps and connects us to one another. And in the economy of God, God's people who stand up for that which is just, righteous, and merciful can change the world.

Beloved, it is easy for us to get caught up in optics, appearances, and reputations. However, the real measure of faithfulness, righteousness, and love of God and one another are our actions, decisions, and comportment in the world. The real measure of whether our lives are pleasing to God are whether we do, love, and walk. Doing, loving and walking is the only defense that will set us free, for that is what God requires.

Amen.