

October 10, 2021 | Journey Worship Service

TEXT: [Micah 6:6–8](#)

TITLE: **What the Lord Requires**

By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy

In recognition of Indigenous People's Day—let us pray this prayer of land acknowledgement and illumination

Faithful God, we join one another today on the land and near the rivers originally in the care and protection of the Adena and Hopewell Nations, and the Monongahela Peoples, and shared over time by many Indigenous Nations—including the Delaware, Iroquois, and Shawnee Tribes—as a place of gathering and exchange.

We join you also on the land and near the rivers cared for and cultivated as a site of Freedom, from the Underground Railroad to global uprisings for racial justice. As a process of Rematriation, we acknowledge our connection to place and honor the land as a relative.

ELPC designates October as Mission Month—a month to highlight the ways in which we support, minister to, and interact with our community both near and far, as well as prayerfully, grapple with what more we are called to do to walk with others. As a PC(USA) Matthew 25 Congregation, we have vowed to work to Eradicate Systemic Poverty, to Dismantle Structural Racism, and to build congregational vitality by actively engaging in the world, so that our faith comes alive, and we awaken to new possibilities.

Although ELPC has pledged to work in all three areas, this October, the majority of our emphasis is on the work of our newest mission committee—the Facing Systemic Racism Committee. The work of this committee can be summarized as facing the structure and systemic racism that exists inside and outside the church and to move our congregants from transactional mission and ministry to transformational mission and ministry that changes our hearts, minds, spirits, and response to people who are oppressed, marginalized, treated unjustly, inequitably, and unequally. To move, breath, love, and have our being as a reflection of God's love for us.

The prophet Micah, very name asks the question, “Who is like the Lord,” was an unlikely spokesperson for the Lord. Hailing from Moresheth, a small village located southwest of Judah's capital city, Micah was sent by God to warn the people Jerusalem and their leaders about the impending doom and demise if they failed to repent and turn back to God. Micah was greatly concerned about ordinary people. He felt great compassion for the poor and dispossessed and he held the leaders responsible for their suffering. Leaders who placed greater importance on their land holdings, their wealth, their well-being, their power, and privilege rather than that of others.

People much like those holding out in congress not wanting to pass legislation that would provide rent assistance, subsidized childcare, create jobs, cut taxes for the middle class, and lower costs for working families, all subsidized by increased taxes on

the ultra-rich. People like those who are passing legislation to gut voter rights and return to a time much like Jim Crow, disenfranchising people of color across this country. People like those who wholeheartedly profess white body supremacy, believing in the name of Jesus that they are inherently better than others who they deem as less than because of the color of their skin, country of origin, religious affiliations, or class. People who profess that they are self-made successes, and that people who are struggle financially, socially, economically, or educationally, just are not trying hard enough. All of these people of influence, affluence, and self-made success forget that it was on the very blood, backs, sweat, and lives of indigenous and first worlds people, and people of African descent that this country and their advantages, familial wealth, and success was gained.

Since 1776, nearly 1.5 billion acres of land was stolen from Native Americans, who never professed to own the land but to be care takers of God's creation. According to one source, from the year 1526 to 1867, 10.7 million people from Africa arrived in the Americas. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hildalgo, signed on February 2, 1848, ending the Mexico-American War, ceded 55% of Mexico's territory, including parts of present-day Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah, to the United States. In biblical times, these historical facts are analogous to Goliath slaying David, rather than what truly occurred.

Micah's warnings to the people of God are similar to that of his contemporary, Isaiah, who declared, "who added to the picture of a society where the rich and powerful used their influence to exploit the vulnerable and to create even greater inequities of wealth and influence. (The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol. 5, 690.) God was not pleased then, and God is not pleased now. Micah pronounces that the people of God have caught a case—using the vernacular of some caught up in the justice system. God is bringing a covenant lawsuit or *rib*, against the people of Israel. God calls on the mountains and hills as witnesses or to judge the case. God lists the benefits God has conferred upon the people—God brought them up from bondage in the land of Egypt, sent Moses, Aaron, and Mariam to lead them; when King Balak sent Balaam, son of Beor to curse them, Balaam blessed them instead; and allowed them to cross over from Shittim to Gilgal, on dry land.

By the time we arrive at this sixth chapter in Micah, God had already outlined the charges against Israel in earlier chapters: the powerful covet fields, and seize them and take houses 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).

Just like some people of influence think it their God-ordained right to rule over, disparage, diminish, or marginalize people who they deem as lesser, or some people of affluence who attempt to buy their way out of or to change the course of a situation, the response of the people to God's indictment and evidence is, what can we do to make this right? Will burnt offerings of year-old calves suffice? Or would God be pleased with

thousands of rams, with ten-thousands of rivers of oil—or better yet, will the sacrifice of my first-born pay for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is approached under the cover of darkness by the rich man who inquired what he had to do to receive eternal life, noting that he had kept all the commandments. When Jesus responded that he should sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor, and he would have treasure in heaven, the rich man went away grieving, because he just could not depart with his worldly wealth. We too have trouble and grieve the very thought of giving up what we perceive to be our worldly treasures and advantages—things like our perceived power and authority, titles, position and standing in the community, and yes, even our beloved financial stability and wealth.

What does God want from us? Micah responds. God has already told you what is good and what the Lord requires. To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. It is not enough to march, shouting “No Justice, No Peace. Real Justice is transformative, it seeks to establish or restore community. Commentator Carol Dempsey states: God’s justice is communitive and focuses on relationships between members of the community; God’s justice is distributive and functions to ensure the equitable distribution of goods, benefits, and burdens of a community; God’s justice is social and affects and disrupts societal order necessary for distributive justice.”

To love kindness goes above and beyond our familial, friend, or hallmark-moment, notions or understanding of love. To love kindness is God-like, from everlasting to everlasting, unconditional, forgiving, merciful, and kind. The English language cannot and does not really define or grasp the full or complete meaning of lovingkindness or the Hebrew word *hesed*. *Hesed* denotes and connotes affection and ethical, covenantal, and unconditional love of neighbor. To love as we are loved by God.

To walk humbly with God implies reverence and openness, a sense of personal integrity, candor, and honesty, a modest manner of life that is meek, unpretentious, simple, and respectful. As the people of God, we are called to godliness, to live out the fulness of justice and love, demonstratively, fully, without pretense or expectation. In other words, we are called to walk the walk, not just talk the talk.

As a Matthew 25 congregation, we ascribe to the 31–45 verses of the Gospel of Matthew that state, “on judgement day, the righteous will ask the Son of Man, when did we see you hungry and feed you; thirsty and give you drink; when did we welcome you as a stranger; or clothe you when you were naked; and when did we visit you when you were sick or imprisoned?” And I might add, when did we see you oppressed and confront your oppressor; when did we see you marginalized and brought you to the forefront; when did we see you treated unjustly because of your race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, orientation, ablism, or age, and seek justice for you; when did we see you silenced and stand with you so you would have the courage to speak; when did we see you about to fall or fail, and we rushed to hold up your arms, encourage, and support you? And the Son of Man will reply, as often as you have done justice, and

shown lovingkindness to the least of these, you have walked humbly with your neighbor and with your God. That is what the Lord requires.

May it be so people of God. May it be so. Amen.