

Micah 6:1-8

This year I feel a little closer to normalcy. The women's Thankoffering has returned to full swing with several women taking part in the service. Fair Trades was able to share today with us- Special thanks to Donna for providing items for sale- this is a great way to shop for loved ones in our lives that are hard to buy for. Fair Trade provides unique items that cannot be found anywhere else. I always enjoy learning something about the various crafters when I am shopping. For anyone that is not aware, Fair-trade partners with farmers and craftspeople in developing countries who are socially and economically marginalized in finding markets and customers for their goods. The prophet Micah would be pleased with Fair Trades.

Micah admonished unjust leaders, defended the rights of the poor against the rich and powerful; while at the same time he looked forward to a world at peace centered on Zion under new leadership. The prophet Micah dealt with attitudes toward Justice during the eighth century B.C. This was a time of great wealth and prosperity in the land of Judah. On the outside it appeared that God's people were thriving, but on the inside, they were rotten to the core. The people had stayed so far away from God that they no longer could tell the difference between good and evil. Political corruption was widespread. Economic corruption thrived. Ethical abuses were rampant. The people continued to go through the outward motion of worship, but their hearts were far from the Lord. Much like

America today, their society was characterized by overconfidence and self-indulgence.

Micah was an ancient whistle blower. He blew the whistle on the blatant hypocrisy by announcing God's ensuing judgement on his people unless they repented from their sin. Micah's prophecy mixed a harsh message of judgement with the hope of future restoration at the coming of the Messiah. Micah pleaded with his people to come back to the Lord. America at this moment in time is experiencing an abundant of wealth and prosperity, like the land of Judah during Micah's era. Americans like the Judeans are plagued by the sins of overconfidence, self-sufficiency, and self-indulgence. We have more money and resources than any other period in history, yet we have drifted dangerously away from the Lord. Church parking lots are getting emptier on Sundays and not just because of Covid. Yes, people still attend church, but I wonder why. Is it for the love of the Lord or has it just become a Sunday routine?

Micah 6:1-8 forms the highpoint of Micah's prophesy. He reminds the people that God does not want hollow sacrifices, or empty acts of worship. Micah 6:8 says He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Let me repeat the three things that God wants from each and everyone of us- to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly.

So, what does each of these three acts look like in this modern day.

To act justly means to do what is right and truthful according to God's word. Ask yourself if you are impartial. Acting justly means making fair decisions in our business and personal lives. Do you show more courtesy to a well-dressed businesswoman than to a homeless man or a person in drag? God stamped his image on every human being. We have been called to treat everyone with dignity. Truthful living means you refuse to exaggerate yourself to seem better than your true self. You deceive only yourself when you try to rationalize your decisions or behavior. God establishes governing authorities. He commands us to obey both the rules of the land and of the road, and to respect everyone in authority, regardless of whether we agree with him or her politically. The Bible provides our moral standard; it defines right and wrong. The words and actions of a person of integrity align with God's truth. We should do what is right even when no one is watching — even when it takes more time or costs more money. Acting justly requires *action*, not mere talk. Speaking about injustice — abortion, human trafficking, displaced people — may make us appear caring, but words do nothing to ease the pain of those suffering. Biblical justice is never divorced from acts of love and mercy. To act justly may mean blowing the whistle on unethical practices at our workplace-it might require calling the police on a neighbor who is physically abusing his wife/girlfriend/partner-it might mean refusing to laugh at an ethnic

joke or confronting a racial slur. My family has often educated individuals about not using the word retarded to describe something they believe is dumb.

To love mercy. When it's within our power or right to punish or harm someone but we show compassion and forgiveness instead, we're demonstrating mercy. And while we'd all like to think of ourselves as merciful, it's not a trait that comes naturally. Let's face it. Everyone likes to escape the negative consequences of wrong behavior. Whether a sigh of relief or the thrill of a narrow escape, averting punishment feels good. But is that mercy? Mercy doesn't mean letting injustice prevail. God's mercy for us cost Jesus his life. Jesus took the penalty and punishment that we deserved. Mercy will cost us comfort and time. It will cost us money and status. And it will give us heartache. Facing insults without retaliating; forgiving someone for umpteenth time; graciously bearing the consequences of someone else's sin; reaching out to the lonely, neglected or addicted without expecting anything in return. This is what loving mercy looks like.

The first two acts emphasize our relationship with people, this third act of walking humbly focuses on our relationship with God. Though the world tries to tell me otherwise, I didn't make myself. God created all things, including me, including you, including those in other countries. When we acknowledge that everything we are comes from God, we understand his authority that leads us to surrender to him. God created all people in his image. Intelligence, beauty, and

physical ability all come from him. So, no person is worth more than another person. We walk humbly with God by valuing each life and respecting all people. God has entrusted the care of the earth to people. Seeing ourselves as stewards — not owners — keeps us from exploiting the world for our profit. Protecting earth's beauty and carefully managing its resources are ways to walk humbly with God. To walk humbly with God is to live in a proper fear and relationship with Him. We can do this through active prayer, seeking His guidance and will, daily obedience and worship.

God has shown mercy to us, humility empowers us to act justly toward others even when they don't treat us the same way.

The power to walk humbly with God, to love mercy, and to act justly comes from the Holy Spirit — God himself. God invites me — and you to join his work. What an awesome privilege God gives us when he calls us to demonstrate to a confused world what acting justly, love mercy and walking humbly really looks like.

Now that we know how to live a life that is pleasing to God, let's do it.