

“What a Privilege it is”

OT: Psalm 15

OT: Micah 6:1-8

Micah 6:1-8

Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. 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.

“O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! 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. 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.”

“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? 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?”

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?

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

Who is Micah and why is his message from the Lord worth paying attention to? Micah was a resident of a small village called *Moresheth*, which was in the foothills of Judah, southwest of Jerusalem. This means Micah lived in the shadow of the great city up on a hill and this had great influence on his writings. I think this is true of us all. Our cultural surroundings, no matter how hard we try, influence the meaning of things and impact what we know and how we feel. For Micah, this meant an extra sensitivity for the sufferings of the poor and powerless, whom he eventually champions in his preaching and writing. The speeches he offered are addressed mainly to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, whom of course we claim as our ancestors in the Christian tradition. For better or worse, their actions, or inactions, are a part of our history.

Throughout his prophecies, Micah wants to remind his listeners, first the early Israelites and now us, of the unity of the people as the Lord’s covenant partner. From God’s message through him, Jerusalem was missing the boat on helping God care for others, particularly

those less fortunate. Jerusalem's focus, and perhaps more specifically the religious leaders, had shifted inward, leaving villages like *Moreseth*, filled with people who believed and worshipped the same loving God, with barely enough. The lack of action and expression from Jerusalem suggested to Micah that Israel was forgetting what it meant to truly worship God.

Micah's prophecy is divine instruction on how Israel was called to worship and live for God. Worship could not only be defined by making materialistic offerings of a sacrificial calves, rivers of oil, or even a firstborn son, but by doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly (or wisely) with God. What I believe Micah was defining as worship was the incredible privilege of loving and serving others, not just a checklist of religious duties.

Maybe we could think of it this way: "Hey you, don't you know what a privilege it is to be on God's team? Don't you know what a privilege it is to follow and honor God? Hey, don't you know you have been blessed by God to do wonderful things? You are more than the rich offerings you can bring. You can do more for God's people, for God's kingdom. Don't you know what a privilege it is to look out and love one another as an act of worship to God?"

In many ways, I think this comfortably complacent and suffering from spiritual amnesia, describes much of the church today. I have contributed. I have been there recently. There have been multiple times throughout my call to serve God in which periods of ministry have become rather routine. Just lately, I have felt what Will Willimon called last week, "muddling through"; where every step is like walking with concrete blocks as feet and every task feels like climbing a mountain. In these periods, I lose sight of what God's mission and call to worship truly are. I feel like a mime stuck in a box in the middle of a busy street. I get bogged down on less important matters and get out of the rhythm of true ministry; spending time with people, listening, talking, and serving. Lately, I found myself asking a lot of questions:

"Why do certain things happen to people who don't deserve it? Why cancer? Why them? Why did they have to fall and get hurt? Why can't they catch a break? How can we be of support to those who don't ask for help but really want it? *Dogs, why are you barking at the air?* How am I ever going to accomplish everything for everyone that wants something? When is enough going to be enough? What is the purpose of all this? *To my kids: Really, again? Do we talk that way? Don't you think it would be kind to share? Why don't you listen? Can you hold your blanket up out of the mud, so it doesn't have to be washed for the third time today? Don't you like your dinner? Do you think it feels good to kick your brother?* God, how do we know whether we are getting it right? How long have things been mixed up and confused and tainted in the world? On the more practical end: God, why aren't pews, offering plates, and stomachs filled?"

“Muddling through” is not always fun. You can probably sense the irritation and frustration bubbling up. And this is just my head from 5:30 to 5:45 in the evening. But no matter how troubling and weighty these questions are, I always seem to come back to the same place. I call it my default mode. It never fails, when I am perplexed and just about to throw in the towel, God reminds me, or sends some angel (and some of you know who you are) who reminds me, what a privilege it is to serve God and God’s church no matter how high the flood waters rise. Ministry is not a job or a Sunday routine, it’s a privilege to be chosen and used by Jesus. Paul writes to the Ephesians (3:7) “By God’s grace and mighty power I have been given the privilege of serving him.”

What a privilege it is to serve God, “To do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God”, and to, as the psalmist in Psalm 15 wrote, “abide in God’s sanctuary; to do what is right, walk blamelessly, speak truth, assist their neighbor, stand by their oath even if hurt, lend money with no interest, and protect the innocent.” It is worth every effort and sacrifice necessary.

Here is the thing. If we stop to think about what is required for us to serve and worship God too much, our minds begin to get in the way. We begin to over think and by the time we sort out our thoughts, which may be never, we have already missed wonderful opportunities of impact and influence. And in the end, thinking too much can lead us to our own alternative thoughts, rather than Gods.

I was talking with some members a few months ago about an invitation to join a class and bible study. The initial response was I don’t know how to get started. Well, the best way, I have found, is to start. We don’t need to wait to have all the answers before we start. If that were the case, no one would ever go anywhere or do anything. Once we get started in God’s work, God, through faith and our openness to let God pilot, will continue to guide and direct us each step of the way. God has taken the first step in calling us and putting us here. Our first step is following and obeying. And be assured, when you walk with God, you won’t be disappointed in the gifts given to you.

Now, if you have the tendency to think every task God calls you to is monumental, like leading a march for a good cause or being the catalyst for a revolutionary change, I would like to offer that smaller tasks are more the norm of what God has in mind. As each of us accomplish a small thing, the ripple effect will be large, and God’s kingdom will benefit from the impact.

There is a song out right now called “Dream Small” and it talks about how small things are made a big deal with God, and thus change the world.

It's a momma singing songs about the Lord. It's a daddy spending family time that the world said he cannot afford. It's a pastor at a tiny little Church forty years of loving on the broken and the hurt. Dream small. Don't bother like you've gotta do

it all. Live well, Loving God and others as yourself. Find little ways where only you can help. It's visiting the widow down the street or dancing on a Friday with your friend with special needs. These simple moments change the world. Keep loving, keep serving, keep listening, keep learning, keep praying, keep hoping, keep seeking, keep searching out of these small things and watch them grow bigger. The God who does all things makes oceans from rivers. With His great love a tiny rock can make a giant fall; Yeah, five loaves and two fish's could feed them all. Dream small.

The highest privilege and purpose as a parent is to lead a child in the way of Christ.

- Max Lucado

You are as much serving God in looking after your own children, training them up in God's fear, minding the house, and making your household a church for God as you would be if you had been called to lead an army to battle for the Lord of Hosts.

- Charles Spurgeon

While taking a routine vandalism report at an elementary school, a policeman was interrupted by a little girl about 6 years old. She stared at his uniform and asked, "Are you a cop? Without looking up, the policeman said yes and continued writing the report.

The little girl continued, "My mother said if I ever needed help, I should ask the police. Is that right?" This time he looked at the bright-eyed little girl and said, "Yes, that is right." The little girl extended her foot and said, "Well, then, would you tie my shoe?"

In that moment, what was the greatest, most heroic thing the man with a uniform and a gun could do? Kneel down and tie a little girl's shoe.

Real heroes don't wait for monumental, historic moments to act; they practice the characteristics of a hero in the little moments of life. They pause to talk to an elderly man sitting alone in the park, cheer for the last person to cross the finish line or leave a generous tip for a hard-working server.

-Ken Davis

Jesus said, "whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40)

What a privilege it is to be on God's team; to serve God's purpose; to participate in God's church; to reveal God's love; to show God's mercy; to walk with God; to give money to God's mission; to offer a helping hand; to receive the generosity of others; to share the good news of Jesus; to have the knowledge and experience to teach; to be strong enough to serve and assist; to offer the patience of a listening ear; to extend a warm hand; to embrace a crying soul; to make someone laugh and be filled with pure joy. What a privilege it is!!!