

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
Year A

Micah 6:1-8

Psalms 15

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Matthew 5:1-12

It has been called “The Golden Text of the Old Testament” and has appeared on coffee mugs, sweatshirts, and a multitude of other items. But, there is more to Micah 6:8 than a quick slogan. In our culture of wanting cute sayings that might stick with us, “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly” fits the bill. What is the prophet trying to get across in this verse?

If we look at the entirety of this passage from Micah 6, it looks like the proceedings in a court of law. “Rise, plead your case”. This introduction is followed by a recitation of how God has rescued the people of Israel through the centuries. This is followed by a pleading of how Israel has offered an ever-increasing scale of sacrifices to God. Is that enough? What does God really expect from us?

Too often, both the Israelites of old and the church today offer lip service to what God wants, while continuing to live our lives as might please us. We “talk-the-talk” but do not “walk-the-walk”, so to speak. Looking at the entire book of Micah, we see that God is fed up with this attitude and calls on the prophet to answer the indictment. Thus, the rhetorical question, “What does God require of you?”

The psalm asked the same question in a different way. The Psalmist asks who can abide in God’s tent or dwelling? While Micah tells us that God requires us to do justice and love mercy, the Psalmist says we are to walk blamelessly and speak the truth. Perhaps, the Psalmist is responding to Micah. In both cases, we are being instructed in the ways of God – how we might prepare ourselves to enter into God’s presence.

The key, according to some commentators, is just this, to look at the totality of the Beatitudes with three principles in mind: simplicity, hopefulness, and compassion. By following these three principles, we see that the Beatitudes can be a model for living daily in the spirit Jesus intended. While the readings from Micah and the Psalms may look at a broader set of standards, the teaching of Jesus draws us into a more simplistic mode of life. Too often, we look at these sayings for what we want them to say, not what Jesus is really saying. Thus, living the Beatitudes requires us to examine how we interact with others and commit ourselves to treating others as Christ would treat them.

Our hopefulness does not rest in what we see around us, what governments and business leaders do, but in knowing that God has a plan and we are part of that plan. This is not to surrender to outside forces, but to approach the world in a spirit of hope, even when what we see may indicate something quite different. We must stand in the blessed assurance that the day will come when mercy, humility, peace, and love describe what it means to live.

According to Henri Nouwen, compassion grows when we recognize that our neighbor shares our humanity. It spans all differences and barriers which might divide us. On Ash Wednesday, we are reminded that we are but dust and to dust we will return. This is true for all mankind. Everyone has the same destiny. Keeping that in mind as we interact with others, we will remember that we really are all one family. We walk this pathway of life together, holding each other up. But how?

We live the Beatitudes and answer the prophets of old through our daily service to others. Through prayer for our community, through serving meals and providing a safe space for people to deal with addiction, and by being truly present to those in need we show that we do justice, we show mercy, as we walk humbly before our God.