

“What God Wants”

Micah 6:1-8

February 2, 2020

Did you ever have a teacher or a boss for whom it seemed like you just couldn't do anything right or whatever you would do was just not good enough? One of the requirements for all freshmen when I was in college was that we had to take one semester of swimming, which was worth one credit of PE and one semester of boxing and wrestling, which were each ½ of a credit for Physical Education. Boxing and wrestling took place every Wednesday, with one hour of boxing followed by one hour of wrestling. We nicknamed the boxing and wrestling classes “beating and bleeding,” as every week someone would get beaten with a black eye or broken nose in boxing, and someone would always end up bleeding after wrestling. The professor who taught boxing was a tough ex-Marine who had several combat ribbons from his service in Vietnam and the rumor among the students was that the only way you could get an “A” in boxing was to join the boxing team, which he coached. A case in point was a senior during my freshman year who had all “A”s in every class, except boxing, which he received a “B” his freshman year. He was not part of the boxing team, but he took boxing a second time as a sophomore hoping to get an “A,” but he got a “B” again. He graduated from college with an “A” in every class, except for a “B” in the ½ credit course of boxing. I'm sure there were times when he felt like saying to the professor, “What do you want from me? I've taken this class twice, what else do you want me to do?”

I wonder if we ever feel that way about God. Have you ever asked yourself, “What does God expect of me? How am I supposed to live my life?” We try to be good people. We come to church, bring our offerings, support the youth, we even sign up for different service opportunities and yet, week after week through Bible readings, the sermon, and Sunday School or Family Night, it can seem as if God is always urging us to do more or to be better. So out of frustration, especially when things have not gone well for you, maybe you've thought to yourself, “What do you want from me, Lord? I'm trying my best.”

In our Old Testament lesson for today the prophet Micah was charged by God with confronting a self-centered group of people who thought they were better than many others. What's sad is that not only did these people fail to see how far they had fallen away from God through their sin, but they believed that God owed them something. Even though they had plenty of failures, they thought they could bargain with God by bribing Him to overlook some of their failings.

The setting in this text is like a courtroom and God begins as the lead prosecuting attorney with some important questions about their behavior spoken through Micah. In Verse 3, God says, “O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me.” In other words, what God is asking here is: “Why would you turn away from me? Can you mention even one instance where I was not faithful, loving, and fair with you?” This was a case of God's faithfulness vs. His people's unfaithfulness, and the people of Israel did not have an answer. So the Lord presented evidence of His faithfulness, saying in Verses 4-5: “I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, and I sent you leaders – Moses, Aaron, and Miriam – as you wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. I protected you and led you into the land of Israel that I promised to you. And I did all this so that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.” And at this point God rested His case.

But the people of Israel don't seem to get it. They don't even try to make a defense of their actions. They knew they had been unfaithful, they knew they had failed to love their neighbors as themselves, they knew they had turned away from God, but instead of asking for mercy and forgiveness, they ask God what they had to do to get back into His good graces. In verse 6, they ask, “With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?” What they are really asking is, “So what do you want from us God? What will it take to make things right?” So they made some suggestions in verses 6-7, asking, “Shall I come before you 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?” In other words, “Would that satisfy you, God? Would that be enough to get you to drop those whole case?”

To such arrogant, outrageous words, God's response is simple and restrained. With tremendous patience and love, God's message in Verse 8 is that there is nothing they can do to restore the relationship. God, out of His

love will forgive them, and in response to His love He says, “There’s only 3 things I want you to do. I want you to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” That’s it. Make every facet of your lives, every institution in your communities, every encounter you have with others, be defined by doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with your God.

Suddenly, it becomes clear just how far the people of Israel, and how far we, have fallen from the will of God. Suddenly it’s clear how much easier it would be to produce those thousands of rams or ten thousand rivers of oil, than to transform their lives into genuine expressions of justice, kindness, and humility. These 3 things that Micah mentions are the qualities that God expects of His own people. And just as Micah spoke to the community of Israel at that time, he speaks just as directly to us today, to this community known as Holy Cross Lutheran Church.

So, what does God want from us? The answer is “nothing.” Through Jesus’ perfect life and death on the cross, God has done everything for us to create a right relationship with Him. Therefore, He simply asks that as a response to His goodness and love that we worship Him and keep Him, and not the things of this world, first in our lives; and that we invest our time, our abilities, and our money into people – in the opportunities He provides for us to show kindness and love to each other inside and outside the church. But a church that is turned inward, looking only upon itself and obsessed with marks of success and materialism, rather than with holiness and wisdom, justice and love, and humility and grace, is a church that has lost its way.

Over the past 3 years we have been going through a process known as “Building To Serve,” in which we have been investing our resources to build God’s people for works of service, which specifically involves expanding our facility so that it can be used to grow our current ministries, create new ministries, and reach more people with the love of Jesus – especially for those who do not know Jesus as their Savior. In a few months that facility will be completed and I know many of us are getting excited. But if the building and the budget and the programming ever becomes our main focus, ahead of God and caring for people, then we will have lost our way.

The loving, forgiving, grace of God is costly, because it demands our whole allegiance, our whole selves; but sometimes people think this means we need to make sacrifices or give a lot of money or have near perfect attendance at church in order to earn God’s love and grace. But that is not the case at all. There is nothing we can do that will get us into the arms of God or earn good health or convince God to do something for a loved one. And that’s hard to accept at times, especially since we live in a world that values hard work and says nothing is free. Our God is not like that frustrating boss or teacher; and He would never ask anyone to sacrifice their firstborn child or to do some good deeds, no matter how sincere, in order to earn His forgiveness, as the Israelites suggested. Our God is a loving Father, who wants to have a relationship with us and who wants us to take advantage of the opportunities He gives us for others to see His love and presence within us. That understanding will lead us to stop asking, “What do you want from me God?” and instead to ask, “What can I do for you, Lord? How can I thank you for all the blessings you have given to me?” And God gives us His answer: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with Him.