

“Micah: Faith-Full Living”

July 26, 2020

Old School: Prophets Series – Livestream

I read it early this week – a post from a high school classmate about an experience she had (and asked if I could share it). “When I pulled up to my Grandma's assisted living apartment complex to deliver her meds and groceries, there was an ambulance outside the end door where I was meeting her. I waited until the ambulance left before getting out of my car, and as I’m walking up the walkway toward Grandma, I see a rather large puddle of fresh blood on the ground. “

I asked, "Whoa! What happened?!"

Grandma responded, "A lady fell and hit her head. But she was sitting up and talking when they put her in the ambulance."

That sounded thankfully optimistic.

A few minutes later, a young man came around the corner of the building asking about the fallen lady. He asked if she was okay, and did they take her in the ambulance. I asked the young man, "Do you know her?"

"No, but I saw her laying there so I helped her up and sat with her until other people came."

He explained that he was in a vehicle with some of his buddies, headed to get food, when he looked out the window as they drove past the complex, and he saw the elderly lady on the ground. He told the driver to stop the car, and he ran to the lady to help her. He helped her sit up and said he lifted her into her chair. He didn't want her to lay there bleeding. He told his friends to go ahead without him, get the food, then come back for him.

When I told him how wonderful he was for that, he just smiled and said, "I'd want someone to do it for my Grandma. She's 91."

He sat on the bench outside the assisted living home, waiting 30-45 minutes for his friends to come back for him. In the meantime, I learned that his name and that he's 21 years old."

My classmate wrote, “I know there is more love and goodness in this world than evil. But it seems lately like the evil and hatred is louder. Meeting this young man reminded me that the reason the love is quieter is because love is not boastful, proud, or self-seeking.” And then she referenced I Corinthians 13:4-8. But she could’ve easily turned to Micah, too: *Do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God...*

And maybe you saw the story of Captain Tom Moore, a former British Army officer, active during World War II. **SHOW SLIDE** He is now Captain Sir Tom Moore. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II this week at 100 years old because he did something incredible. He raised over \$40 million for the National Health Service in Britain during the past few months by doing laps on the 82-foot brick walkway near his garden. His family encouraged him to do the laps to help with his rehab, and then the story went viral.

In a New York Times article, Moore said that during World War II “the people my age, we were fighting on the front line and the general public was standing behind us. In this instance, the doctors and nurses and all the medical people, they’re the front line. It’s up to my generation to back them up, just as we were backed up.” Moore’s tenacity made me think of those words from Micah: *Do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God...*

Micah, like all biblical prophets, is a truth-teller - speaking truth to power - and a messenger of God sent to share what God wants from God’s people. *He has shown you, O human one, what is good and what does the Lord require of you?* God’s own action and character are a model for how we should be and what we should do. This isn’t new, but it bears repeating. And if we were to make a bumper sticker with the message of Micah and, really, the spirit of the prophets, it’s here in chapter 6: *do justice, embrace faithful love, walk humbly with God.* I love it. I can even memorize that! But what about taking it in and living it?

These words from Micah came in a time of struggle. Rev. James Harnish writes, “Micah spoke to a violence-prone world perched on the brink of war, dominated by military power, ruled by force, infected with corruption and injustice.” Harnish says we might notice some similarities.

Micah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah in the late 700’s BC, though he spoke to the northern kingdom, too. King Hezekiah responded to God’s message through Micah and was a godly king. Yet, Micah spoke against many social sins of the people – greed, injustice, and empty rituals instead of heartfelt faith in God. He was especially hard on those who were exploiting the poor and not caring for the most vulnerable.

King Hezekiah had instituted major reforms that restored Temple worship. The people were doing what was right, but it was as if they were simply going through the motions of faith. They got an “A” for outward change, but there wasn’t much inward transformation – not a true heart change.

There were 613 commandments in the Law that Israel followed – the Ten Commandments expanded on in detail! Micah boils them down to these three

principles: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. These words are powerful, especially for those of us who struggle with perfectionism. I grew up wanting to do everything right and wanting to achieve all that I could. I wanted to know what to do and how to do it correctly. I wanted to be better, to be smart, and to do well in anything I tried. And if I couldn't do well, then I usually steered clear of it!

God's word in Micah presents us with a challenge and a hope for what God wants as we seek to live holy, faith-full lives and how we are transformed when we follow God's leading. We hear God asking Israel to plead its case as if they're on trial - why they've been unfaithful when God has been faithful. God has kept the covenant; Israel has not! When God speaks, we hear pain and anguish that God feels as the history of the salvation story is recounted. "O my people, what I have done to you?"

It's as if God has become a burden to the people, even with the love, mercy, and grace God shows them. God is disappointed that they've forgotten: Remember how I led Israel out of Egypt – out of slavery and bondage? Remember Moses, his brother Aaron, and their sister Miriam?

They would have heard the words of what we know as Exodus 15 many times. If you look there, you'll read that Moses sang to the Lord, and then Miriam picked up a tambourine and sang a song of praise to God because God had delivered them. God asks the people to remember their story—the time when they were in slavery and God brought them out in the Exodus. How do you respond to God who saved you?

The people have forgotten what God has done. They have lost sight of God's salvation. They don't remember who they are. Even with their attempt at "right religion," they've forgotten what it means to live in right relationship with God. That's really Micah's point – right relationship is more important than right religion. They're trying to earn God's salvation. They've forgotten that God's salvation is a gift to receive and live into.

So, someone responds. "With what shall I come before the Lord?" "What is it that you want from me?" We've asked a similar question, right? We ask it all the time—children to parents, parents to children, spouse to spouse, friend to friend. *What do you want me to do?*

And we've probably asked God, too: "God, what do you want from me?" Whether we've felt like God is against us or whether we've figured we'd done something so bad that God would never want to have us back again, we've asked it. But Micah says it's more than doing something right.

The people of Micah's time think they have it right. They're doing everything they're supposed to do, but God wants more. We hear this list of offerings: calves or rams or oil – even my firstborn? What will please God?

The answer is nothing new. It's something already known. One paraphrase says: *Hasn't he shown you what's good? Don't you know what he expects from you? It's very simple: to be fair with people, to give people some slack and to know your place with God.*

It's not what we can do for God that matters, but who we are for God that matters. God cares about who we are on the inside and how that looks – a transformed life on the outside. God cares about if we've received the gift of God's salvation and how that affects how we live in the world.

"Salvation is not doing more things; it is being the transformed people that God has brought into existence." God is just. Do justice. Justice isn't something we dream about or wish for. We can pray for justice; but if we want to do justice, we have to take action. And many times doing justice means challenging people and systems that seek to devalue people based on race, age, class, culture, gender, sexual orientation, or ability. God calls us to work for fairness and equality to ensure that all people are valued because they are beloved by God and part of God's family.

God loves steadfastly. Do the same. Show love, loyalty, and faithfulness to others beyond the minimum. Consider how much God loves the world—enough to send Jesus to show us ultimate love and sacrifice. God's love is timeless and unconditional. Think about a close relationship that really matters to you, and why you show kindness to another person. We show true kindness out of love, not out of duty or fear. Embrace faithful love...

Be humble and remember who you are. Seek God's will. In doing justice and embracing faithful love, we walk with God, knowing that God walks ahead of us, leading us, and also beside us, as a true companion. Walking humbly with God is a careful, deliberate, and intentional walk. We're not perfect, but God is. We need God with us, and we need one another.

Do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God. These are hallmarks of faith-full living. So what do we do? Even when it all seems like there's so much to do and it's overwhelming, what do we do? Do we cower in fear and apathy? No! We do something. We stop and help when we see someone in need like the young man my classmate met because that's justice and faithful love. We take steps - sometimes literally - to help others like Captain Sir Tom Moore. We do something because it matters. It shows faith in God who saves.

We do something. We live now into the vision that God offers. We do something – what we can – where we can - to fulfill the vision of God's coming kingdom. We rise to the call of Micah - to be faith-full in word and action. Let us pray...

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