

A Needed Reminder

Micah 6:1-8

2/2/20

A few days after Christmas,
as a gift to all of us,

we went to the Great Wolf Lodge in Concord.

This was our first time at, *the Lodge*.

For most part it was great:

the room, the water rides, the fun the girls had

...the food...well let's just say

I have some food suggestions if you go.

Maybe not all of you know

what the Great Wolf Lodge is

—basically, it is a hotel

with a pretty large indoor water park.

And let me tell you,

there's nothing quite like

putting on your bathing suit

a few days after Christmas

when you've been eating junk food

and all the carbs since Halloween.

Because it is an indoor waterpark,

there are some rules and requirements.

What you have to wear,

what you can bring into the water park area,

how late you can be there,

those kinds of things.

And it turns out,

there are also height requirements.

We all put on our suits

and went downstairs to the park

and they measured the height of each girl

and gave us all a bracelet.

Arlie, Tripp and I had unlimited access to the rides;

Huntley was one inch short

of the requirement needed to ride everything.

You must be this tall to get on this ride.

Which meant Huntley was too short

for one ride in particular: *The Howlin' Tornado*.



Here's how GWL describes the ride:

“Take a super-fast thrill ride
in a raft built for four.

The swiftly tilting twists and turns
of this water park favorite
will have you howling even before you drop
into the six-story funnel of fun.



See how high you can ride up the walls
before you shoot into the last tunnel
for an unforgettable splashdown.”¹

Of course, Arlie picked me to go with her
—but y'all I would have lost some bladder control
going on that ride,

so, I told her that her Daddy
really wanted to ride that with her.

Though the raft is built for four,
only two of us can ride in it.

It's hard to explain to a tall,
but not quite tall enough, 5-year-old,
that you don't meet the requirement.

It's hard to explain
why requirements are important
and why we have to follow them.

I had to keep reminding her
that the requirement was there to keep her safe.

There are plenty of requirements in our lives.

A requirement is compulsory;
it's a necessary condition.

¹ <https://www2.greatwolf.com/concord/waterpark-attractions/swim-splash-slide/howlin-tornado>

As in, you are required to be at least 16 years old
and have completed driver's ed
and have proof of insurance
in order to get your license.

Those are the requirements.

If you want to go out of country,
you are required to have a valid,
up-to date passport that won't expire
within 6 months.

Requirements.

Whether it is about height or driving age or travel
plenty of requirements are about safety.

In the church,
we don't talk a lot about requirements.
It is sort of taboo these days, isn't?

It can feel too conservative
or too hard-lined—

the safer options when it comes to church
is to **NOT** talk about requirements;

because we want to welcome people

and grow our numbers

not turn people away

because of a dirty word like,
requirements.



Micah's words are some of the most famous,

some of the most repeated,

some of the most bumper stickered prophetic utterances
we know by heart.

Most of us can recite John 3:16,

For God so loved the world...

and Ps. 23, *the Lord is my shepherd...*

and then there's Micah 6:8;
"and what does the Lord require of you?
—*but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God.*"

Why is this the requirement of the Lord?

Because sometimes God's people need a reminder.

Because sometimes even the best of us
can be blinded by our own

wealth, health, comfort and privilege.

The people ask,

with what shall I come

before the Lord

and bow myself before God?

We need a reminder.

We, like ancient Israel, can be distracted and preoccupied
with our own selves; forgetting, neglecting, ignoring
what God has already told us is good.

These requirements are about
covenant and relationship;

the relationship Israel has with God

and the relationship Israel has

with everything else

because of the blessing

of her relationship with God.

We can say it this way too:

the relationship God has with us

and therefore, the relationship that we have

with each other and creation.

What does the Lord require of you?

To do justice.

That's why we're here isn't?

Because we can see that all is not right.

Justice, is the structuring of our society

[required] by God,

and in which all life,

all life can thrive.²
Deep down, isn't there is a longing in us
for the world to be less broken,
less violent, less hostile
to the diversity of creatures and species?

We long for justice in big ways:

for harmony, reciprocity and compassion
between white people and black people
and brown people and... *all people*.

And we long for justice in personal ways:
Even as we write checks and go to spaghetti dinners
we want a world where warming centers
and soup kitchens aren't necessary.

It is a powerful thing that we do a pulpit swap
with our brothers and sisters
at Morning Star First Baptist Church.

It is a powerful thing that we have
Rev. David Roberts and his choir
come and lead us in worship
and that Whit and our choir
are invited to go and lead worship
in their church.

But justice implores us to keep going further.

Justice asks us to enter into the lives
our of brothers and sisters at Morning Star
beyond an hour Sunday morning
and make sure that here in Hickory
our lives thrive *together*.

We want clean,

renewable energy.

We want to find ways to reduce our waste
and use what we have.

We want recycling to work.

You are supposed to bring your own water bottle

² Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffey Dictionary of Theological Terms, Ed. Rolf A. Jacobson (Augsburg Books, Minneapolis, MN 2008) pg.102

to the congregational retreat,
in February, did you know that?
Because we aren't going to bring any cases of bottled water.
Montreat will give us big containers of water
where we can refill out bottles.
Justice asks at every turn
to consider the care we take
of our planet and her resources.

What does the Lord require of you?

To do justice—to put our talk and our walk together:
to make sure that the laws and regulations,
the requirements we vote on
from our city council to our national government
propose and promote
sustainability and dignity and worth for all.

Micah “was a prophet...living in a time
of major socio-economic change in Judah,
including an increasing gap
between rich and poor.

[Micah] was especially concerned with injustice,
and in particular, with idolatrous corruption
among the religious and political powers that be.”³

The poorest in the land
were not being cared for.
Greed, power, apathy and ignorance
were breaking down the community
under the watch
of God's own people.

“Injustice shows itself, according to Micah,
primarily in three [ways]:
in coveting what belongs to others,
in perverting justice,
and in hypocritical religiosity.”⁴

³ <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2020/1/28/blessing-first-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-epiphany-4>

⁴ Hans Walter Wolff, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/micah/>

I've forgotten if we are talking
about a prophet from 8th century BCE
or this week's news?

It is true that for Micah
there was no separation of church and state.
The Temple, the priests, the elders, the king, were in charge;
they interpreted the law of Moses,
they carried out justice for the people
—religious life was a misnomer—
there was no religious life,
it was just life,
it was all the same, all tied together.

It is different now.

This is my religious life;
this is my social life;
this is my work life;
this is my home life.
We compartmentalize really well.

We need a reminder.

Religious life is a misnomer.
Faith without works is dead.
Micah's prophetic word of requirements
is both general and particular;
a message to the nation of Israel
and a word for you and me.

**What does the Lord require of you?
To love kindness.**

Lovingkindness is caring for others.

For Jewish faith, particular acts of lovingkindness
are carried out on an individual level:
visiting the sick,
comforting the mourners,
[engaging in] hospitality,
and the care of others' social welfare.⁵
We're Southerners!

⁵ Gemilut Hasadim 101, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/gemilut-hasadim-101/>

We have those acts etched into our bones!
But God has shown you o mortal
what is good;
do the hands-on things you already know, Micah is saying?
We need a reminder.

**What does the Lord require of you?
To love kindness.**

A more recent act has been added to those four:
our Jewish brothers and sisters are reclaiming
the sixteenth century notion of
tikkun olam, the repair of the world.
Lovingkindness involves repair of the world.
We Christians like to say
repairing the world is God's work
and sometimes use that as an excuse to be hands off.
But the beautiful thing is
God has never liked to work alone:
we are invited into that work every moment.
And in that work of *tikkun olam*,
the doing of justice and loving of kindness
that's where we the church,
find our talk and our walk
coming together.



In Budapest, there was a Scottish Mission house
staffed by a woman named, Jane Haining.
It was a mission house for young girls
and in 1944 the Scottish matron
was given orders to attached yellow stars
to her girls from Jewish families.
But Jane was a different kind house mother;
though she was strict,
she was devoted and loved her girls.

She taught them to see themselves as equals
and that caring for others
was part of our shared humanity.



So, when the Nazi orders came for her
to identify and single out her Jewish girls,
all the girls in the house wore stars.
The Christian girls wore the stars
as a bold act of solidarity,
an act of lovingkindness.
Jane sheltered those girls for 4 years
before she was arrested
and sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau.⁶

We need a reminder.

“God desires more than empty words.
God desires justice that is measured
by how well the most vulnerable fare in [our] community,
[by] a loyal love—the Hebrew word is *hessed*,
steadfast love—
that is [proportionate] with the kind of loyal love
that God has shown toward Israel,
and a careful walking (*halaka*)
in [our] ethical lives.”⁷

⁶ <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2020/Christian-girls-wore-yellow-stars-on-their-uniforms-in-act-of-solidarity>

⁷ Andrew Foster Connors, Micah 6:1-8 Pastoral Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year A, Vol. 1 (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2010) pg. 292



**What does the Lord require of you?
To walk humbly with your God.**

You cannot love kindness
and do the work of justice
unless you orient your life
toward the Lord.

The perceived distance
between us and God
is mostly on our end.
And as we come up with ways
to lessen the distance,
we often misread the Almighty.
There is no need, Micah says,
to exaggerate: to offer burnt offerings of,
thousands of rams,
rivers of oil,
even your own child
in order to bridge the gap.⁸

Those exaggerations are not hearts
walking humbly with God.
They are the responses of consumers;
consumers who expect that God wants things.

Another way to say,
what does the Lord require;
is to say,
what does God want?
What does God want;

⁸Joseph Blenkinsopp, A History of Prophecy in Israel: Revised and Enlarged (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 1983, 1996) pg. 96-97

does God want animals, oil, things?
Does God want—and this is such an exaggeration—
does God want my first born???
No.
God does not want things.

God wants you.
God wants covenant.
God wants relationship.

That is the heart of requirement for the Lord:
doing justice, loving kindness
and walking humbly with God.

Micah tells us to walk with God humbly or wisely;
Eugene Peterson translates that as,
“don’t take yourself too seriously—take God seriously.” (The Message)
To walk humbly with God
is to orient your life
around God’s words and actions.
To seriously trust God’s heart
by how God reveals
God’s self to us
in word and deed,
in requirements,
in relationship with us.

Walking humbly is Micah 4:2,
“Come, let us go up to the mount of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may instruct us in His ways
and that we may walk in his paths.” (JSB)

Take God seriously when the instruction
is live your life
with and “for God and others,
acting as an advocate
for the powerless
and showing care
for those who are hurting

or need help.”⁹

What does the Lord require of You?
To walk humbly with your God.

This call to walk should sound like the call of Jesus,
who didn't say *believe* as often,
as he said,
come,
walk,
follow me.¹⁰

What does the Lord require of you?
These answers are dynamic.
Doing justice,
loving kindness
and walking humbly
are things ***we do***.

These requirements are decisions
we are well equipped to make
because we have come here
to be reminded.
You do not have to be this tall
to follow God's requirements
These requirements of the Lord
are not for our safety.

Remember that psalm
you know by heart,
“even though I walk
in the valley of the shadow of death,
you are with me.”

These requirements
are about covenant.
They are relationship.
They are promise.

⁹ James Limburg, Hosea- Micah, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (John Knox Press, Atlanta, GA 1988) pg. 193

¹⁰ *ibid*

God does not want things,
God wants you.

“What God demands of you
is to fulfill the requirements of justice,
be faithful to commitments,
and live your life in humble
and attentive openness to God.”¹¹

I don't know about you, Church,
but I think it might be time,
to talk about requirements.
I know I can always use a reminder.

¹¹ ibid