

“What Does the LORD Require of You?”

MICAH 6:6-8, EPIPHANY 4-A, JAN. 29, 2017

“He has told you, O man, 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” (Micah 6:8)!

It's possible that some of you may have memorized these words years ago, when you were in Sunday school or maybe even you were an active part of a Church Youth Group. If you've ever taken a trip to Washington DC—to do some sightseeing—it's quite possible that you may have also read them on the wall of the Library of Congress—because they are inscribed there!

When President Jimmy Carter was inaugurated as the 39th President of the United States on January 20, 1977, he had the “swearing-in” Bible opened to this great passage of Micah 6:8, because of his profound personal commitment to the Christian faith and because of his personal commitment to the cause of human rights all around the world!

It was in the 8th Century BC that the Prophet Micah prophesied. He was a young contemporary of the Prophet Isaiah and like the Prophet Amos, who was raised in a rural agricultural setting of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, Micah was a southerner and the son of a farmer too—and as a farmer—he was prejudiced with a certain amount of mistrust that he carried around within him with respect to “city slickers” and he had a good reason for it!

It was the city-slicker judges who took bribes to render unfair judgments, and city-slicker priests who were immoral and corrupt, and city-slicker prophets who would prophesy any message that the people wanted to hear—in exchange for a few shekels that was!

It was extremely unfortunate that the priests and the prophets were not living up to God's expectations of them and a large part of that reason is because the people of Judah did not want them to do so. The only preaching they wanted to hear was: “God's in his heaven and all is right with the world!”

In the words of our Old Testament lesson this morning, the Prophet Micah is standing outside the temple of King Solomon, daring to ask himself a very important question out loud—and out loud because that's how heavy this question was weighing upon his heart and mind.

I know I've done it at times, and perhaps you have done it a time or two also in your life – when I've stood still and asked myself a question out loud because of the perplexity I was experiencing, and hopefully also because I didn't believe there was anyone else standing near enough to me, to actually hear me!

The question the Prophet Micah asks himself, as he was standing outside of Solomon's temple, about ready to enter the temple to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was: *“With what shall I come before the LORD and bow myself before God on high” (v. 6)?*

Please take note, however, that the Prophet Micah was not totally clueless as he was searching his own heart and mind for an answer to that big question because his own initial thoughts with respect to that question were actually four-fold!

(1) First he thought that he could bring to the LORD God some burnt-offerings; some burnt offerings—of some year-old calves—and certainly there was a Biblical precedence for doing this!

The first seven chapters of Leviticus indicate that a **new born calf, only 7 days old could be offered as a burnt offering** (Leviticus 22:27) to the LORD God, but—a better sacrifice would be for that devoted worshiper to feed and take care of that newborn calf until it was a year old and then offer it up unto the LORD God as a burnt offering!

(2) But then secondly, the Prophet Micah wondered out loud to himself—if there was even something greater than even a few burnt offerings that he could bring as a peace offering to the LORD God, because of the way that the **people of God** and he had sinned against the LORD. **Maybe it would be better to offer up to the LORD God a thousand rams!** -- So, therefore, he asked himself in verse 7: *“Would the LORD God be pleased with thousands of rams”* (v. 7a)? -- And surely, we might be thinking to ourselves that this would do the trick, wouldn't it, especially when we remember that when the LORD God commanded Abraham to take his son, his only son Isaac whom he loved to Mount Moriah and to offer him up as a sacrifice to the LORD God there, strangely enough Abraham set out to become totally obedient to God's command! But just as Abraham had now lifted the knife over Isaac and was poised to drop that instrument of death deeply into his son's chest, this is precisely when the LORD God called out to that great patriarch saying: *“Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me”* (Genesis 22:11-13)! And in that very moment: *“Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son”* (Genesis 22:11-13)! -- **And do you catch my drift? Certainly, if one ram was an acceptable sacrifice to offer up to the LORD God back in Abraham's day, then surely thousands of rams would no doubt be abundantly acceptable to the LORD God also, wouldn't they?** Thus, the Prophet Micah must have reasoned with himself!

(3) But then, the Prophet Micah who must have been drowning in a pool of his own ambivalence by this time, continues to stand there outside of Solomon's temple one day saying to himself: *“With what shall I come before the LORD and bow myself before God on high”* (v. 6)? And then a third possibility presented itself to Micah.

The third possibility is presented to us in this next question: “Will the LORD be pleased with ten thousand rivers of oil” (v. 7b)?

Olive oil was one of Israel's primary agricultural products. It was made by **crushing ripe olives to extract the oil**. Lesser grades of olive oil could be extracted from these crushed olives if they were crushed a second time, but the oil that resulted from the first pressing was considered to be the best—even as it is today—known by its most popular name: “Virgin Olive Oil!” -- In addition to being used when cooking and baking, only the highest grade of olive oil could be used for the lighting of the sacred lamps in the temple!

Of course, he would be, though I am quite certain that the Prophet Micah did not have any kind of strategy alive in his head as to how he could ever have possibly accomplished a goal such as that!

Here the Prophet Micah was making another effective use of that literary device that is known as HYPEROLE (purposeful exaggeration to make a point)!

(4) So now the Prophet conjures up in his own mind a fourth possibility, outside of Solomon's temple, the biggest gift imaginable yet: “Would the LORD God be pleased if I offered to him, my firstborn son, for my transgressions—that is the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul” (v. 7)?

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, we hear God saying to the people of Israel way when: *“You shall give the firstborn of your sons to me. You shall do likewise with your cattle and your sheep. Seven days they shall be with their mother, but then on the eighth day you shall give it to me”* (Exodus 22:29b-30; see also Exodus 13:12-13; 34:20).

HOWEVER, (AND THIS IS A BIG HOWEVER), the Lord did not require the Israelites to offer their firstborn sons as sacrifices on the altar. Instead, they were to **redeem their firstborn children by the** payment of five shekels to the priest (Exodus 13:11-15; 34:19-20; Numbers 3:44-51; 18:15-17).

We cannot help but conclude, therefore that the offering of a firstborn son as a sacrifice would not please the Lord. Such an offering would constitute nothing less than a grave sin against the 5th commandment: *“You shall not murder”* (Exodus 20:13).

But then suddenly it seems as if the Prophet Micah hears the Holy Spirit of God speaking directly to him, impressing upon his heart and mind a message he must have no doubt heard before, but had somehow, unfortunately, allowed to become shifted to the back burner of his life! Therefore, the Holy Spirit of God is willing to refresh the prophet’s memory saying to him: *“God has told you, O man, 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!*

Suddenly, the Holy Spirit takes Micah’s idea of his hoping to please the LORD God in an entirely different direction! The Spirit of God doesn’t say that the offering of sacrifices would be bad. Such sacrifices, after all, were commanded by God in the Old Testament Mosaic laws! **However, the primary focus of this verse is not on external acts that we human beings might perform—such as the offering of sacrifices,** but on new and different attitudes that the LORD God almighty himself might now provide into the deepest inner recesses our lives—into our hearts and minds that would no doubt also manifest themselves eventually in lives to God and others through positive actions in our lives towards God and towards our fellow human beings.

(1) What does the Lord require of you? First, of all to do justice!

You might remember that old story about a man who was informed by his doctor that he had rabies. The doctor also had to inform the man that he had waited too long for the treatments now to do him any good. The patient, quite naturally, looked devastated but before the doctor console him, the doctor was called out of the man’s hospital room for an emergency.

As soon as the doctor could return, the doctor did return. As he opened the door that doctor could see that the patient was writing something quite vigorously onto a piece of paper! Hesitantly, the doctor asked: “Excuse me, sir, but is that you’ll will that you are writing?”

“No,” the man said. “I am making a list of all the people I want to bite before I die!

Now this might sound like justice to us—but this could never be justice to us as the committed followers, as committed disciples, living out our faith in this world. **BECAUSE GOD HAS SO FREELY/COMPLETELY FORGIVEN US OUR SINS—WE ARE COMPELLED BY GOD’S LOVE TO DO THE SAME FOR OTHERS.** Remember the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35)

(2) Secondly, to love kindness.

Mike Breaux tells the story of a man and his wife who went to a restaurant that featured grilled steaks and a salad bar. As they dine, a girl comes out with a 5-gallon bucket of THOUSAND ISLAND

DRESSING to fill up the salad bar. But she catches her heel and launches the 5-gallon of THOUSAND ISLAND DRESSING ALL OVER THIS ONE GUY. He's got Thousand Island dressing from the top of his head to the bottom of his shoes; dripping off his forehead, off his chin, on the lapels of his suit, all over his tie, all over his pants, all over his shoes. He is a mess. Now if you were the one covered by THOUSAND ISLAND DRESSING – what would you do; how would you have responded in that frightful situation?

Unfortunately, this man goes ballistic. He starts calling this poor girl every name a marine drill sergeant ever used. And he says, "I can't believe just how stupid you are! Look at this! This is the first chance I've had to wear this suit. It cost me \$350 and you have completely ruined it!"

The young lady is trying to say to the gentleman, though he wasn't really a gentleman, "Sir..." and she's trying to clean up.

"Get away from me! You've caused enough damage, haven't you?" Even his wife chimes in saying to this embarrassed young woman: "That's right it's a \$350 suit!"

Everybody in the whole restaurant is watching, and he demands, "I want to see the manager!" The manager comes out and says, "Is there a problem?"

"Yes, there's a problem. This stupid girl has ruined my suit. It's the first chance I've had to wear it. It cost \$350!"

"Sir, we will clean your suit for you. No problem. We will take care of that!" to which the man replies: "I don't want my suit cleaned. I want a brand-new suit. It's completely ruined!" That's when the manager writes this disgruntled customer a check for \$350, hoping that at least in this man's mind that justice would be served!

But here's what's interesting about this story is that it happened on a Sunday at the noon meal. So why in the world would a guy be in a suit on a Sunday afternoon? Oh, I don't know—but there is a good possibility that he had just come from church and listened to a great sermon on loving your neighbor as yourself and turning the other cheek. People who work in the food industry will tell you that some of the worst people to wait on are the people who just got out of church on a Sunday morning. That's tragic, because, friends, we're called to worship not only inside of these walls, but to worship outside of these walls as well.

We are called to worship in restaurants. We are called to worship at the ball field. We are called to worship at the golf course. We are called to worship in the classroom or even in our office cubicle. But how do you worship without walls? Micah says: "He has told you, O man, 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!?"

(3) And thirdly to walk humbly with your God!

And yet isn't this only possible to any degree, when it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us and when the life we now live in the flesh, we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself up for us (Galatians 2:20)? Even though we are sinners, Christ Jesus left his Heavenly home to enter our world – as he told John the Baptist on the day of our Savior's baptism: ***"To fulfill all righteousness for us" (Matthew 3:15)!***

To walk humbly with our God is to give thanks to our Creator and Redeemer daily, that what the Prophet Micah suggested he might do – ***"To give up my firstborn for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul!"*** but couldn't do, is exactly what the Heavenly

Father has done for every one of us! He gave up his Son for us, and his Son out of love for his Heavenly Father and for every one of us gave up himself for us as well! ***“What does the LORD require of you? To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God!” (Micah 6:8) AMEN***