

Living Micah's way or the way of the Beatitudes

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4th Sunday after Epiphany – Micah 5:1-8, Psalm 15, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, Matthew 5:1-12

INTRODUCTION:

As I have reflected upon the readings for today I have been struck by the question. How does God want us to live? I think our readings from Micah, 1 Corinthians, and Matthew can shed some light on this question, as I hope to show you. So let's get started.

POINT 1:

Let's consider Micah first. He lived in a small town about 23 miles southwest of Jerusalem. He was a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea. He prophesied during the precarious period of the fall of Israel to the Assyrians, around 722 BC. During this time both Israel and Judah were kingdoms suffering tumults within and without. Micah's words had two main focuses. The judgment and fall of Israel and Judah and a future restoration of God's people.

The reading we have today is set in the context of a metaphorical court-room scene. God has a controversy with his people. Charges are being brought against them. God is saying, after all I have done for you people of Israel, you still are wondering how I want you to live?

And the people ask, *With what shall I come before the Lord...shall I come before him 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? But God is not interested in what sacrifices the people will offer, the things they offer. God is interested in the people themselves, what they will do. So the answer to the question how does God want us to live is not, bring more sacrificial offerings to appease God but this, **He has told you, O mortal, 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.**

POINT 2:

Many centuries later when Jesus appeared on the scene, he became the living example of what it meant to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God. And he called disciples and expected them to live like this as well. And he calls us to live the same way today. This is where our reading from Matthew is relevant. The Beatitudes, as they are called, are essentially a description of what doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God are all about. They are a blueprint that answers the question, how does God want us to live?

The difficulty is that the beatitudes are not an easy blueprint for the world that we live in. They are asking us to live in a way that is almost diametrically opposed to our culture and often our nature as human beings. Let me give you an example of what I am talking about. In our world we do not applaud the meek. We think they are weak. We applaud those who are strong. Those who get ahead. Those who are important. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are often regarded as religious zealots and mocked. Those who are merciful are regarded as the exception, rather than the rule. .And who are the pure in heart? What does this even mean to us? Blessed are the peacemakers, as the war continues in Ukraine, and the world refugee crisis continues to escalate. And who wants to be persecuted for righteousness' sake or reviled because of their allegiance to Jesus Christ? Not many

of us, I am guessing.

My point is that to actually live the beatitudes is very countercultural for us, and yet if we are to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God, this is what we are being asked to do.

POINT 3:

Let me add that I do not think we are the only people to struggle with living Micah's way or the way of the beatitudes. I think the church at Corinth had exactly the same issues as us. Let me remind you that they would not have had the luxury we have of Matthew's record of the beatitudes. Paul's letter to the Corinthians was written roughly 30 or 40 years before the Gospel of Matthew was compiled. They just had the Old Testament and Paul's letters to work with. So how does Paul convince them to be followers of Jesus and understand how they should live. His answer is to talk about the cross of Jesus. For Paul the crucifixion was the epitome of what it meant to do justice, love kindness and to walk humbly with God. He says to the people at Corinth, **the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.** Paul is saying to the Corinthians, in order to be saved you need to be broken, as Jesus was broken on the cross. You will embrace God when there are no other options, when all is lost. That is when the cross will stop seeming foolishness and will start to make sense to you.

CONCLUSION:

We should not kid ourselves. To live justly, kindly, and humbly is not easy, and it never has been. The model Jesus set for his followers led to a cross remember. By the world's standards of fame, the cult of celebrity, social media influencers, wealth, superficiality, cybercrime, phone addiction, food waste, body image obsession and the list goes on, Micah and Jesus hardly get a look in. But, the cross of

Jesus and his way of life have not disappeared. They are still the gold standard for those who identify as Christians.

How do we as individuals and as a community live out Micah's call to justice, loving-kindness, and humility or Matthew's words of the Beatitudes? That's what we need to figure out, living in a society and a world that does think the cross of Jesus is foolish or just irrelevant?

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom of God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.....