

Micah 6:1-8
January 30, '11

“DOING, LOVING, WALKING”

WHEN YOU LOOK AT YOUR ANNUAL REPORT TODAY, ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS YOU’LL NOTICE – FOLLOWING THE TABLE OF CONTENTS – IS OUR MISSION STATEMENT.

THE ENTIRE MISSION STATEMENT CAN BE CONDENSED INTO A SINGLE PHRASE – “*HEADS, HEARTS & HANDS FOR CHRIST IN SERVICE & CELEBRATION.*”

THAT’S NOT SOMETHING WE JUST PULLED OUT OF THE AIR.

IT’S NOT SOMETHING A GROUP SAT AROUND & DEvised ON THEIR OWN.

THOSE WORDS ARE BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS.

IN MATTHEW’S GOSPEL, WHEN JESUS WAS ASKED TO NAME THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT, HE SAID IT WAS “*TO LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL & WITH ALL YOUR MIND & TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.*”

I SUPPOSE ONE COULD SAY HE CHEATED A LITTLE BECAUSE HE DIDN’T OFFER ONE BUT TWO – LOVE OF GOD & LOVE OF NEIGHBOR.

BUT I THINK WHAT HE WAS SAYING IS THAT THESE TWO CAN’T BE SEPARATED FROM ONE ANOTHER.

THAT’S WHAT OUR MISSION STATEMENT SAYS.

OUR MISSION IS TO LOVE BOTH GOD & OUR NEIGHBOR – HEAD, HEART & HANDS FOR CHRIST IN SERVICE & CELEBRATION.

IT’S A SIMPLE STATEMENT & YET IT CAPTURES SO MUCH.

LAST YEAR, ONE OF OUR ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOCUSED ON A LITTLE BOOK THAT WAS WRITTEN CENTURIES AGO BY JOHN WESLEY – THREE SIMPLE RULES.

WESLEY’S GOAL IN THAT BOOK WAS TO CONDENSE & SIMPLIFY THE GOSPEL & A MEANINGFUL CHRISTIAN LIFE INTO THREE LITTLE THINGS THAT ANYONE COULD DO – THINGS THAT WOULD LEAD TO A MORE FULFILLED EXISTENCE.

IT *DOES* SEEM TO BE A MUCH MORE PRODUCTIVE APPROACH, DOESN’T IT, IN VIRTUALLY ANY ENDEAVOR. IF RULES, GUIDELINES, EXPECTATIONS & REQUIREMENTS ARE KEPT TO A MINIMUM, IT’S SO MUCH EASIER TO TRY TO ABIDE BY THEM.

WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE BIBLE – WHEN YOU SEE THE HUNDREDS UPON HUNDREDS OF RULES & REGULATIONS – IT CAN BE MIND-BOGGLING & DOWNRIGHT DISCOURAGING.

SOME OF YOU MAY BE FAMILIAR WITH THE RECENT BOOK WRITTEN BY A. J. JACOBS – THE YEAR OF LIVING BIBLICALLY.

HIS GOAL WAS TO LIVE FOR AN ENTIRE YEAR EXACTLY BY BIBLICAL STANDARDS.

HE WAS OVERWHELMED AT THE DIFFICULTY OF DOING SO.

THERE ARE SO MANY LAWS – SO MANY REGULATIONS – SO MANY COMMANDMENTS!

WE LONG TO FOLLOW THOREAU’S ADVICE TO “*SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY.*”

I THINK, TO A GREAT EXTENT, THAT'S WHAT MICAH HAS GIVEN US IN THIS PASSAGE – THE VERY SIMPLEST OF ALL DIRECTIVES.

PERHAPS THAT'S WHY THIS PASSAGE IS CLEARLY THE MOST WELL-KNOWN IN THE ENTIRE BOOK OF MICAH & ONE OF THE MOST-REVERED PASSAGES IN ALL THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS.

IT'S THE EIGHTH & FINAL VERSE THAT IS KNOWN TO US, BUT THE VERSES LEADING UP TO IT PRESENT A FASCINATING PICTURE.

MICAH WAS ONE OF THE GREAT PROPHETS OF ISRAEL FROM THE 8TH CENTURY B.C.

HE WAS AN OUTSPOKEN CHAMPION OF THE OPPRESSED & UNDER-PRIVILEGED.

HE FEARLESSLY ATTACKED THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC INJUSTICES OF HIS DAY.

THE SCENE OF THE PASSAGE WE'VE READ IS THAT OF A LAW COURT.

ISRAEL IS ON TRIAL FOR VIOLATING THE SINAI COVENANT MADE WITH GOD.

THE WITNESSES ARE THE “MOUNTAINS & HILLS” AND THE “FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

IN ESSENCE, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM, ALL OF CREATION IS CALLED UPON AS A WITNESS AGAINST THE PEOPLE.

GOD IS CALLING THE PEOPLE TO ACCOUNT FOR FORGETTING EVERYTHING GOD HAS DONE FOR THEM IN THE PAST.

“WHAT MORE COULD I POSSIBLY HAVE DONE FOR YOU!?” GOD ASKS.

AND THEN HE REMINDS THEM OF ALL HE HAD DONE ON THEIR BEHALF.

HE RESCUED THEM FROM SLAVERY IN EGYPT.

DURING THE EXODUS, WHEN BALAK – KING OF MOAB – DEvised A SCHEME TO HAVE ISRAEL CURSED BY THE PROPHET BALAAM, GOD MOVED HIM TO BLESS THEM INSTEAD.

HE GAVE THEM SAFE PASSAGE ACROSS THE JORDAN – SHITTIM ON ONE SIDE & GILGAL ON THE OTHER.

SO HOW IN THE WORLD CAN THEY HAVE FORGOTTEN EVERYTHING GOD HAS DONE FOR THEM?!

THE PEOPLE HAVE NO DEFENSE & LOOK INSTEAD TO TRY TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT.

ALL THEY CAN THINK OF, THOUGH, TO WIN GOD'S FAVOR IS THE SACRIFICES THEY MIGHT OFFER – BURNT OFFERINGS, CALVES, RAMS & RIVERS OF OIL.

FINALLY, IT'S THE OFFERING OF THEIR FIRSTBORN – *“THE FRUIT OF MY BODY FOR THE SIN OF MY SOUL.”*

BUT THEN, MICAH STEPS IN & SPEAKS ON BEHALF OF GOD.

“DO YOU STILL NOT GET IT? I DON'T WANT YOUR RITUALISTIC SACRIFICES. I DON'T WANT YOUR MEANINGLESS WORSHIP.

INSTEAD, ALL I ASK IS THIS – THAT YOU DO JUSTICE, LOVE KINDNESS & WALK HUMBLy WITH ME.”

A PRETTY SIMPLE SET OF INSTRUCTIONS, WOULDN'T YOU SAY?

JUSTICE, KINDNESS & HUMILITY.

THAT'S IT.

THAT'S ALL GOD ASKS OF US.

IT'S PRETTY SIMPLE & PRETTY STRAIGHTFORWARD.

BUT IT'S THE "-ING" WORDS THAT ACCOMPANY THOSE THREE THAT MAY TRIP US UP.

IT'S THE DOING, LOVING & WALKING IN CONNECTION WITH JUSTICE, KINDNESS & HUMILITY THAT CAUSE US TO STUMBLE.

LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK.

EVERYONE WOULD SAY THEY WANT JUSTICE.

WE'RE ALL IN FAVOR OF EQUAL TREATMENT FOR EVERYONE.

WE DON'T WANT THOSE WHO ARE POOR & OPPRESSED & DOWNTRODDEN TO BE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF.

WE WANT TO SPEAK OUT FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NO VOICE & FIGHT FOR THOSE ON THE FRINGES OF SOCIETY.

IT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

BUT, AS DON HODGE IS FOND OF SAYING, "*WHEN ALL IS SAID & DONE, THERE'S A LOT MORE SAID THAN DONE.*"

MICAH ISN'T TELLING THE PEOPLE TO BE *SUPPORTIVE* OF JUSTICE OR *THINK* ABOUT JUSTICE OR *BELIEVE* IN JUSTICE.

HE SAYS, "*DO JUSTICE.*"

IT'S A CALL TO ACTION FOR EVERYONE WHO WANTS TO SERVE THE GOD OF THE LEAST & LOST.

FAR TOO MANY WHO CLAIM TO BE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST - AND THAT MAY VERY WELL INCLUDE BOTH YOU & ME – CLAIM TO WANT JUSTICE BUT NEVER *DO* ANYTHING ABOUT IT!

I THINK ABOUT THE NUMBER OF MISSION PROJECTS OF THIS CONGREGATION & THE VARIETY OF OPPORTUNITIES WE OFFER TO SERVE OTHERS.

AND I THINK OF THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN THOSE PROJECTS.

I CAN'T HELP BUT CONCLUDE THAT THERE ARE FAR MORE PEOPLE WHO *THINK* ABOUT JUSTICE THAN THOSE WHO ARE *DOING* IT.

YOU REMEMBER THE LIMERICK THAT I'VE SHARED WITH YOU SO MANY TIMES YOU SHOULD BY NOW BE ABLE TO RECITE IT WITH ME –

"THE LIVING CHRIST IS WHAT I LONG TO SEE,

I CANNOT LEAN ON WHAT USED TO BE.

SO SHUT YOUR BIBLE & SHOW ME HOW,

THE CHRIST YOU TALK ABOUT IS LIVING NOW."

THE FIRST SIMPLE REQUIREMENT MICAH GIVES US IS TO "*DO JUSTICE.*"

THE SECOND IS TO "*LOVE KINDNESS.*"

THE WORD FOR "*KINDNESS*" CAN ALSO TRANSLATED AS "*MERCY.*"

THE HEBREW WORD "*CHESED*" REALLY TRANSLATES MOST ACCURATELY AS "*LOVING KINDNESS*" AND IS MOST OFTEN CONNECTED WITH THE LOVE & MERCY & GRACE EXTENDED TO US BY GOD.

I THINK WHAT MICAH IS CHALLENGING US TO DO HERE IS TO BE AS LOVING, MERCIFUL & GRACIOUS AS GOD IS AND, IN ADDITION, TO LOVE BEING LOVING, MERCIFUL & GRACIOUS.

HE'S CALLING US TO MAKE "CHESED" – LOVING KINDNESS – A WAY OF LIFE FOR US – SOMETHING THAT BRINGS US BOUNDLESS JOY & FULFILLMENT.

HE WANTS US TO BUBBLE OVER IN EXCITEMENT AT THE PRIVILEGE OF DOING EVERYTHING IN A SPIRIT OF LOVE.

NO MATTER WHAT WE DO IN LIFE – NO MATTER WHAT OUR CALLING – NO MATTER WHAT PROVIDES US WITH A PAYCHECK – IT CAN ALL BE DONE IN LOVING KINDNESS.

THERE WAS A PICTURE OF A SHOEMAKER THAT HUNG ON A SUNDAY SCHOOL WALL.

THE OLD MAN WAS DEEP IN PRAYER AS HE SAT AT HIS WORKBENCH.

THERE WAS A BEAM OF LIGHT SHINING DOWN ON HIM WHICH OBVIOUSLY REPRESENTED THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

BUT WHAT MADE THAT PICTURE TRULY UNUSUAL WAS THAT, MOVING UP TOWARD GOD THROUGH THAT BEAM OF LIGHT, WAS A STREAM OF SHOES.

THEY WERE ASCENDING UPWARD TO GOD.

WHAT THE PICTURE WAS TRYING TO SAY WAS THAT THE WELL-MADE SHOES THAT THE MAN HAD CRAFTED WERE A SACRED GIFT TO GOD.

WHAT HE HAD MADE AT HIS WORKBENCH WAS A PRAYER OF GRATITUDE TO GOD.

EVERYTHING HE DID WAS DONE TO THE GLORY OF GOD.

WHAT HE DID, HE DID TO THE GLORY OF GOD.

RITA SNOWDEN, THE ENGLISH AUTHOR, DESCRIBES A VISIT SHE MADE TO A LITTLE VILLAGE.

SHE TELLS HOW, AS SHE SAT DRINKING TEA AT A SIDEWALK CAFE ONE AFTERNOON, SHE SUDDENLY BECAME AWARE OF A VERY PLEASANT SMELL.

IT WAS AS THOUGH SHE SUDDENLY WAS SURROUNDED BY FLOWERS.

WHEN SHE ASKED WHERE THE WONDERFUL FRAGRANCE WAS COMING FROM, SHE WAS TOLD THAT IT WAS FROM THE PEOPLE WHO WORKED IN THE PERFUME FACTORY.

ALMOST ALL OF THE VILLAGE CITIZENS WORKED IN THE FACTORY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TOWN AND, AT 4:30, WHEN THE WORKDAY WAS OVER, THEY CARRIED THE SCENT OF THE PERFUME WITH THEM OUT INTO THE STREETS.

THAT'S THE CHALLENGE TO US FROM MICAH – THAT EVERYWHERE WE GO & WITH EVERYTHING WE DO, WE GIVE OFF A FRAGRANT AROMA OF KINDNESS & LOVE & GENEROSITY.

AND HE TELLS US NOT TO JUST *DO* THINGS THAT ARE KIND, LOVING & GENEROUS, BUT TO *LOVE* DOING THEM AS WELL.

MICAH'S SIMPLE REQUIREMENTS FOR LIVING A FAITHFUL LIFE INVOLVE DOING JUSTICE & LOVING KINDNESS.

AND IF WE SUCCEED IN BOTH OF THOSE, SURELY WE WILL BE MEETING MICAH'S FINAL REQUIREMENT -
WALKING HUMBLY WITH OUR GOD.

I RECENTLY HEARD A STORY ABOUT THE IMPACT A PERSON'S HUMILITY CAN HAVE ON OTHERS.
JOE WAS AN ALCOHOLIC IN NEW YORK CITY WHO CAME TO FAITH AT A RESCUE MISSION.
PRIOR TO HIS CHANGED HEART, HE WAS LOOKED DOWN UPON & CONSIDERED HOPELESS.
BUT FOLLOWING HIS CONVERSION, EVERYTHING CHANGED.
JOE BECAME THE MOST CARING PERSON ANYONE ASSOCIATED WITH THE MISSION HAD EVER KNOWN.
HE SPENT HIS DAYS & NIGHTS HANGING OUT AT THE MISSION, DOING WHATEVER NEEDED TO BE DONE.
THERE WAS NEVER A TASK TOO LOWLY FOR JOE.
THERE WAS NEVER ANYTHING THAT HE WAS ASKED TO DO THAT HE CONSIDERED BENEATH HIM.
HE CLEANED VOMIT OFF THE FLOORS FROM THE ALCOHOLICS & SCRUBBED THE BATHROOMS.
EVERYTHING HE DID WAS DONE WITH A SMILE ON HIS FACE & GRATITUDE FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF
HELPING SOMEONE ELSE.

ONE NIGHT, WHEN THE DIRECTOR OF THE MISSION WAS DELIVERING AN EVANGELISTIC MESSAGE, THERE
WAS A MAN WHO STOOD UP & WALKED TO THE FRONT & DROPPED DOWN ON HIS KNEES, CRYING OUT FOR GOD TO
HELP HIM TO CHANGE.

HE WAS CRYING, "OH, GOD. MAKE ME LIKE JOE! MAKE ME LIKE JOE!"

THE DIRECTOR OF THE MISSION LEANED OVER TO HIM & SAID, "SON, I THINK YOU'D BE BETTER OFF
SAYING, 'MAKE ME LIKE JESUS.'"

THE MAN LOOKED UP AT THE DIRECTOR WITH A CONFUSED EXPRESSION AND SAID, "IS HE LIKE JOE?"
WOULD THAT ALL OF US MIGHT LIVE OUR LIVES SO THAT OTHERS WOULD SEE, IN OUR HUMILITY,
SOMEONE THEY WOULD WISH TO EMULATE.

THE PROPHET MICAH HAS GIVEN US THE SIMPLEST OF REQUIREMENTS FOR LIVING A LIFE OF FAITHFUL
OBEDIENCE TO GOD.

WHAT A DIFFERENCE IT WOULD MAKE IN OUR OWN LIVES IF WE TRIED TO FOLLOW THOSE
REQUIREMENTS.

WHAT A DIFFERENCE IT WOULD MAKE IN THE LIFE OF THIS CHURCH FAMILY.

WHAT A DIFFERENCE IT WOULD MAKE IN OUR COMMUNITY IF WE ALL TRULY SOUGHT TO "DO JUSTICE,
LOVE KINDNESS & WALK HUMBLY WITH OUR GOD." AMEN.

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