

## Trinity 14

I take as my text this morning the words of the Prophet Micah from the **Morning Prayer lesson** for today, the eighth verse of the sixth chapter.

*And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.?*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.*

When we visualize God in terms of the **Old Testament**, we tend to see him as a God of wrath, an iron-fisted Creator ruling his creation, the world, with all the forces of nature, and then some.

But, when we read the words of the prophet Micah, we see another side of God, a just God, a God of love, a God of mercy.

Micah lived in the eighth century before Christ, yet he is said to have foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the Advent of the Messiah.

We see in the words of Micah, eight hundred years before the birth of Christ, an expectation of some very Christian values: justice, mercy, humility.

More importantly, Micah has added action to these concepts. He says *to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly*.

What Micah seems to be saying is that what is required of us for salvation is a commitment to action, not just a surrendering of ourselves to God.

God is not looking for us to be wimps. Just as he is a God of action, so should we be people of action.

Furthermore, Micah reminds the Jewish Nation that her sin is a sin against love. God has poured down his love upon Israel, delivering her from bondage and bringing her into the *Promised Land*. But Israel turned her back on all this **Divine Love**.

Israel, on the occasion when she comes to her senses and acknowledges her guilt, she, at the same time pleads ignorance on how to approach and appease God. She is even willing to result to human sacrifice and to adopt the sacrifice of the *first born* in order to win God's favor. The sacrifice of children was not uncommon in the time of Abraham and reminiscent of his obedience to God's call in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of Genesis, when he took Isaac up the mountain to offer him as a burnt sacrifice.

We see this in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings when Manasseh succeeded his father Hezekiah as king, 21<sup>st</sup> chapter, verses 4 - 6:

*And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD said, In Jerusalem will I put my name.  
And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.  
And he made his son pass through the fire....*

The meaning of *pass through the fire* is to offer as a burnt offering.

This happened again under the reign of Jehoiakim, which we find in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of Jeremiah, verses 30 - 32:

*For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the LORD: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it.*

*And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be called Tophet, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter: for they shall bury in Tophet, till there be no place.*

It is interesting to note that in the passage from Jeremiah, *Tophet* is not an actual place but stands for **abhorrence** and is an offhand reference to Baal.

Nothing could be more abhorrent to us today that offer our children as burnt sacrifices but in the time of Abraham that was not uncommon, nor the centuries that followed.

Now, at this point, God has commanded Micah to address the people of Israel, telling them to hear what the Lord has to say to them, which Micah does by calling upon the hills, the whole earth, to witness God's controversy with his people. In this discourse, Micah delivers a touching appeal to nature, to history, and to reasonable service to God.

If we look at his three great contemporaries, Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah, Micah has seemingly summarized their teachings, and the result is the suggestion that:

First of all, social morality is inseparable from religion, indeed, it is rooted in religion; and

Secondly, the true worship of God is the service of mankind.

In other words, we must live our religion. Prayer and worship of God do not begin and end on Sunday morning at church. Our lives must reflect our belief in and love of God.

From Micah, we gain insight into our own Christian religion. Christianity is not a matter of accepting certain concepts such as justice, mercy, and humility; it is a matter of putting action into them.

***To do justly:*** to treat others fittingly.

***To love mercy:*** to be disposed to being kind, forgiving, or helpful; to banish all feelings of revenge and ill will from your heart.

***To walk humbly:*** to be unpretentious or unassuming, with a modest sense of one's own merit; an humble walk with God.

In Micah we can see a parallel to the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus proclaims the religion of love

How difficult can it be to practice justice, mercy, and humility? If we are truly Christians, shouldn't those concepts be ingrained as part of our personal values?

The strength of our faith in God and in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour is demonstrated in how we live that faith.

While we may be able to give other people the perception that we are living the faith, we cannot deceive God, and it is He who will be our judge.

If we are not living our faith, we are missing out on a certain joy that permeates our souls.

Showing mercy or kindness is not a weakness; it takes a great deal of courage and strength sometimes; the same in showing justice or fairness.

And showing humility is not a detractor; it has nothing to do with a person's standing in the community, or position as a professional; rather, it is a matter of acknowledging that in the sight of God, we are all equal.

*To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God* are perhaps the Old Testament equivalent of St. Paul's *Faith, Hope, and Charity*.

These are not revolutionary concepts. We've heard them many times. But they all require action on our part. All require internalization; they must become core values. All require that we surrender ourselves to God and live our faith.

Live our faith. It is not enough to say we have faith, to acknowledge it intellectually. Faith is actionable, not passive. It's not something we keep to ourselves. It's not something we wear on our sleeves. It is something we do with our lives.

We find the strength to live our faith through worship and prayer, both corporate and private. Indeed, our greatest strength as Christians comes when two or more are gathered together in His Name, such as we are doing now, celebrating together the Holy Eucharist.

From the simplest, most anonymous of the saints to the most celebrated, the one thing they have in common, the one thing we today should have in common with them, is a living, actionable faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Live the faith: **do** justly, **love** mercy, **walk** humbly with God.