

Sermon for Church Use
 Micah 6:1-8 & Matthew 5:1-12
 Rev. Sarah E. Sedgwick

Today's scripture readings offer us "new rules for living" as we consider the requirements of God to live out the commandment to love one another.

Both readings give us insight into the phrase "walking the talk." Our first scripture reading is from Micah, chapter 6, verses 1 to 8 and the second reading is from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5, verses 1-12.

Hear now the reading of God's Word.

Both texts we read this morning offer us direct and indirect instructions as to how we are called to live our lives as those who claim to be followers of Christ. Neither texts indicate that it is easy, just required.

It might be good to know that communities since the creation of the world have sought to understand exactly what God would require of them within their lifetime.

Our basis for meeting God's requirements does not come from a place of fear, but from gratitude. The promises found through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the waters of baptism is that God claims us as His beloved regardless of what we have done.

So, it is out of gratitude for the grace and love given to us that we seek to meet the requirements or expectations of God and strive to live our lives as a reflection of our gratitude for God's love.

Even the Prophet Micah wondered what the requirements of God were for his children and the response given remains at the heart of right relationship with God.

The setting of our passage in Micah is a courtroom and God's people are on trial for the choices they have made that have brought them out of a right relationship with God.

As prosecutor, one would expect God to express anger as the case unfolds, but instead, words of heartfelt bewilderment and pleading are proclaimed.

"O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!" In this phrase we pick up the undertones of divine frustration, followed by a brief summary of the exodus event.

The people seem to have forgotten their "story" and in doing so, have forgotten their saving God. As a result of their forgetfulness, God's people have fallen out of "right" relationship with

their God and with one another because of a lack of mindfulness. They no longer seem centered on or in their God.

The beauty of this exchange between God and Micah reflects the desire of God to understand God's people. It truly is remarkable that God shows an openness to engage in dialogue with people.

God interacts with the people about *their* concerns; God does not dismiss their complaining as inappropriate or bring them into court because they have dared to question God.

Quite the contrary, God develops *reasons* as to why they should be appreciative of God's activity in their story even though life has been difficult.

On behalf of God's people, Micah asks God what they must do to maintain a "right" relationship with God. Do the people need to sacrifice more? Do the people give more offering? Perhaps God would be pleased if God's children engaged in better worship?

Seven hundred years before Christ, Israel was in the middle of a revival. The temple was crowded. Giving was over budget for the first time in years, but Micah knew that something was wrong.

Israel was arrogant and uncaring. They are religious, but their idea of what religion means is far from God's hopes for them. They think that religion consists of worshiping "correctly" and staying away from those who do not.

It's just like humanity to want to put a number or a price on a relationship with God. If we give more, God will love us more; if we stick to tradition in our worship; God will be pleased; and if we somehow remain perfect, we will finally have a perfect relationship with God.

But God says, "No" to all these suggestions and responds to Micah with God's requirements for humanity: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.

Three very specific ways to remain in right relationship with God. So why don't we do it? Why is it difficult to engage in any of these requirements made by God to his people? Is it that we have become skilled at "talking the talk" but not, "walking the walk?"

Does your relationship with God include any expectations? This text from Micah says, "Yes." Not as a means to be saved but as a response to God's saving grace. The gift of God's love and our receiving it creates an expectation that we will do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

The reality is that God's people have difficulty maintaining their covenant with God, even when the expectations are "spelled out" for us.

Because of our sin, we create division within our communities and congregations. We ignore opportunities to engage in justice probably because we don't understand what God means by justice. We deny kindness to our neighbor and refuse to have an attitude of reverence and openness to God.

Utilizing courtroom language, you could say that God's people disobey their "probation" and continue to engage in sin that places them out of "right" relationship with the God who created them.

Yet, God does not give up on God's people. God extends God's love so far that God sends his Son Jesus Christ to live with God's people on Earth.

Created fully human and fully divine, Jesus Christ offers a living example of God's desire for each of us to fulfill the expectations to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Which means that if God hasn't given up on us when we move out of right relationship with him then we cannot give up on others – even when they make mistakes.

Rather than someone fearing they might be judged when walking into this sanctuary, we strive to create an atmosphere of loving welcome.

Jesus Christ had something to say about the requirements for Christian living, too. In our text from Matthew, Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes.

It is as if, Jesus understands that God's people need more examples; more information to enact God's requirements spoken to Micah. And just like Jesus, his blessings turn our world upside down.

Beatitude is a state of pure joy. These Beatitudes shared by Jesus are eight blessings given as instruction to God's people.

When we read the Beatitudes we are struck by the poetic beauty and, at the same time, overwhelmed by their perceived foolishness for the world in which we live. We admire the instruction, but we fear the implications of putting the words into actual practice.

We live in a time when blessings given are to those who succeed, often at the expense of others. To be poor in spirit, peaceful, merciful, and meek will get you nowhere in a culture grounded in competition and fear.

And as this is reflected in our culture today it was also reflected, in some way, in Matthew's culture. The congregation, listening to Jesus, was faced with both external and internal problems.

Externally, they were in tension with leaders of traditional Judaism regarding the degree to which the community was faithfully Jewish. Internally, some people were in tension with one another, and some were drifting away.

Sounds like a description of any mainline protestant church nowadays. Perhaps even ours. Tensions rise and for whatever reason, people and families drift away.

So, it may be Jesus' purpose through the Beatitudes to remind God's people that while life may be difficult now, those who faithfully endure can look forward to the return of Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of God's kingdom.

The Beatitudes are not direct calls to action, but are promises. Because we are saved by God; we receive divine promises of care during conflict and difficulty in our lives.

The Beatitudes are our blessings and God's commandments to Micah become our response. Because we are secure in our future that God will bless us, we are asked to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

This is the way in which we can connect these two pieces of text from the Bible.

Often when we hear the word "justice" we envision the need to become "political" and to engage in demonstrations, marches, and sit-ins. This is not entirely the case.

Justice is a virtue to take care of all members of the community. To love kindness involves both affection and ethical love of neighbor, and to walk humbly with God implies an attitude of reverence and openness, coupled with a sense of personal integrity and honesty.

These three commandments are reflected in Jesus' commandment to "love one another as I have loved you." Because we are loved by God through Jesus Christ, we invite the Holy Spirit to equip us to engage in acts of justice, kindness, and humbleness before God and as a result we are able to extend love to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Maybe that's what true blessing is and perhaps it is us that can extend God's blessings to all as we draw together as the family of God, seeing each other as God's beloved children, meeting each other at the points of our brokenness, and conveying to each other God's promises of regard and worth.

We are worthy of blessing, for God Almighty has created us and called us so. And we hear and receive the blessing of God as we gather to worship God with our whole selves.

And yet, there are people near and far who still have not heard the blessing of God given to them. We have the privilege and joy to ensure they hear this blessing.

And the opportunity they have to hear this blessing comes in each moment we offer justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

In God's name we strive to meet the requirements of Christian living. Amen.

Suggested Liturgy and Scripture Readings

Call to Worship – inspired by Micah 6:6-8

L: With what shall we come before the Lord? What shall we bring into the presence of our God, as an expression of our worship and praise?

A: Shall we bring him all that we own? Our finest possessions, our life savings, our investments and property? Would God be satisfied if we brought everything we possess?

L: No, that's not what God is looking for. God has told you what is good and what he expects of you:

A: To do justice. To love mercy. To walk humbly before him.

L: Let us worship God together!

Hymn Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty

Call to Confession

Let us confess our sins,
For the Holy One delights in blessing
Those who seek to walk with God.

Please join with me in the prayer of confession printed in your bulletin.

Prayer of Confession

God, we have not done what is blameless and right, nor spoken truth from the heart with love. We do not keep your word, and when we participate in gossip, our words and deeds cause pain. Forgive us by the power of your mercy that we might stand in the goodness of Christ and walk in the light of his love. Amen.

Silent Prayers of Confession

Declaration of Pardon

L: Sisters and brothers, your sins are forgiven
by the faith of Christ, who chose love over
hatred and forgiveness over blame.

**A: Let us rejoice and be glad, for God's mercy
is great; Jesus brings healing, justice, and peace.
Alleluia! Amen!**

Prayer for Illumination

Let us pray together as we prepare to hear
God's holy word:

Holy God, your blessings are abundant, and your
Wisdom exceeds our grasp. Fill us with your Spirit
As we hear your word this day, that we may be justice seekers
And peacemakers, sharing your life among those who are forgotten,
Weak, or persecuted, and revealing to all your glory. Amen.

Scriptures: Micah 6:1-8 & Matthew 5:1-12
Sermon: Meeting the Requirements of God

Presentation of Tithes and Offerings

Invitation

With what shall we come before the Lord this day? We come with a passion for sharing
Christ's love. Let us walk in humble gratitude, offering to God a portion of the gifts that God
freely shares with us, gifts for the healing of the world. Let us give generously of our tithes and
offerings.

Prayer of Dedication

We thank you, God, that you have blessed us with an abundance of gifts for the flourishing of
your world. May this offering of our life and labor reveal your love as we seek to share your
promised reign with all creation. Amen.

Hymn: Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ

Charge and Blessing

In the spirit of the beatitudes,
commit to leading a life of blessing,
living in compassion, simplicity, and peace.

And may Christ the Sun of Righteousness
shine brightly on your path as you walk
the way of justice and peace.
And the blessing of God, the Creator,
Healer, and Giver of Life bless you
and keep you always. Amen.

Scripture Readings – New Revised Standard Version

Micah 6:6-8

What God Requires

⁶“With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

⁷Will 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?”

⁸He 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?

Matthew 5:1-12

The Beatitudes

⁵ When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.