

“The Big Question: What Does the Lord Require?”

Micah 6:6-8

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When you start a new job or take on a new position or sign on to a new ministry team at your church, you want to know, up front, what is expected of you. You want the new venture to be meaningful and successful and satisfying; therefore, it makes sense to know what the requirements may be. I remember signing up for Geology my freshman year in college. Dr. McGanon spelled out the expectations on the first day of class: buy the textbook; sit in the same seat every day; acquire a geological hammer for the digging we'd be doing in the limestone quarries around the campus; and be kind to the lab assistant who would be helping us with our mineral drawers. To some students, these requirements seemed too heavy, and they dropped the course. To the rest of us, the requirements felt like a challenge we were ready to tackle.

The Prophet Micah surveys the nation of ancient Israel, sees the people are hungry for a fresh relationship with God, and sets out what is required to have a meaningful, productive, life-giving relationship with the Creator. “Do justice; love kindness; walk humbly with your God.” When Micah made this proclamation, some of the people shied away, thinking the expectations were too high, too costly. But others, hearing the depth of the truth in Micah's words, signed on as people of faith who were ready to have a thrilling relationship with the God who had brought them from exile to freedom.

“Do justice,” says Micah. If you want to be in a life-giving relationship with God, be involved in justice work.

From a Biblical point of view, this means taking on projects that enable people to gain access to the basics of life: access to food and shelter; access to education; access to health care; access to an environment of safety; access to meaningful employment. Martin Luther King reminded us of Micah's pronouncement and brought it into the present time. A church that is involved in justice work is a church that doesn't tolerate bullying of any kind; it's a church that consumes a minimal amount of energy; it's a church that regards the spiritual gifts of women equally with the spiritual gifts of men. A church that's involved in justice work feeds homeless people but also seeks to end homelessness. A church that's involved in justice work makes micro loans to women in third world countries so they can start and maintain small businesses. Last year, we provided several \$50 loans. One Malawian mother bought a 100 pound sack of salt and broke it down into zip lock size bags and sold them in the villages. Here's one of those bags I bought in September. I keep it as a symbol of a church involved in justice work.

The prophet Micah goes on to say, "**Love kindness.**" He means, of course, "embody kindness!" Kindness is one of the spiritual gifts named by the Apostle Paul. Kindness makes the world go around. Kindness has to do with the motivation behind the action. It's what energizes us. As I was working on this sermon on Thursday morning, a woman stopped by the office and handed me several hundred dollars in gift cards at a local grocery store. The gift cards were in her out-stretched hand, but what I noticed more than the cards was the kindness in her face. Behind the gift was the kindness. This is what Micah is getting at.

The prophet Micah knew that the secret to a life-giving relationship with God comes when the source of the gift is kindness. If you follow the gift back to its source, kindness is what you hope to find.

In Micah's day, people made gifts to the poor out of obligation, as if it were a religious duty, as if it were just one more thing on a long list of things to do, as if it would allay someone's guilt. What Micah hopes for his people is that they will all build a life-giving relationship with God. He knows this has something to do with kindness being the primary motivator. When it's kindness that is at the source, miracles happen; relationships deepens.

Finally, Micah says, **“Walk humbly with your God.”** In a way, this may be the most challenging of the three. For most of us, this skill doesn't come naturally. In our culture, humility isn't often raised up as a quality to strive for. I doubt that I even heard this word until I was in college. We were taught to strive for excellence and for high achievement and for getting to the head of the class. I remember our junior high guidance counselor driving home the point that a high school graduate makes hundreds of thousands of dollars more than a drop-out, and a college graduate makes millions more than a high school grad. It was all about success in terms of earning power.

In college I participated in Operation Crossroads Africa. I spent the summer of '68 in Niger, West Africa. When I returned to Trinity in the fall, I found myself on the interviewing committee for students hoping to participate the following summer. One of those students was Susan Mascinter. In her interview, I asked her, and I have no idea where this question came from, I asked Susan, “So, what does humility mean to you?” No one had put me up to asking this question. I'm sure I had no idea how I would have answered my own question. But I remember her answer. She took a deep breath, and she said, “Humility is when you try to understand things from the other person's point of view.” I just sat there knowing I had just been taught a life lesson.

I had never heard of Micah. But I now knew something about humility that made all the sense in the world. I believe it was in that moment that I began to value other people's points of view, other people's opinions and convictions. Humility. It makes all the difference in our human relationships. It makes our relationship with God so much deeper, so much more life-giving.

On this Martin Luther King, Jr weekend, it makes so much sense to tune in to the Prophet Micah. Dr. King was acquainted with Micah. And now we are, too. The big question is this: what does the Lord require? Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your God. Whenever we find ourselves embracing this ancient truth, we are living in the greatest of hope. Amen.