

For the Misfits among Us...  
Micah 6:1-8  
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Epiphany 4, Year A  
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One of things I love about this congregation is that I can always say with authenticity, "I'm just happy to be here." I know there are times when people use that phrase sarcastically, but I mean it sincerely here! And a funny thing happened at TAUM's Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast. Congressman Paul Tonko, who speaks every year, asked me how things are going. I told him about serving St. Peter's- an open-minded, progressive, antiracist, supportive of women's rights. Later, when I went to the table where he was sitting, he said to other political dignitaries, "Hey, she's serving this really cool, progressive church!" I know he doesn't represent Columbia County, but how wonderful to be in the conversation of a congressman fighting for justice- on so many fronts.

What does YHWH require of you? Of me? Of us?

That same weekend, I was leading worship at First United Presbyterian Church in Troy- truly a kindred spirit to our congregation in matters of justice and open-minded theology.

For the prayers of the people, they have a book in which people write petitions if they don't want to speak aloud. It works for those who are reticent about public speaking. On that day, there was only 1 petition written-

"For the Misfits Among Us, and for what many in that crowd have to deal with from day to day."

I offered that petition. I know who wrote it- a vital member of that community, who like ours, embraces diversity, sees a multiplicity of ways of viewing inclusion. I couldn't shake the image of **the misfits among us**, and how our calling may well include **being** misfits.

Being misfits as people of faith, because we don't want to fit in- in a society that values white skin over black. We don't want to fit in- in a society that allows people to live in poverty,

Where education is unequal or where people are denied the right to vote. We don't want to fit in, in a society where some are marginalized or cast aside.

Let's be misfits -in the manner of Christ. In his time and culture, he was a misfit on the side of neighbor and justice too. (Instead of who is my neighbor? Who isn't?)

The prophet Micah, like other prophets of his time, valued justice, especially for the poor and oppressed, over cultic practice.

Interesting relationship struggle was going on between God and God's people. We are not certain of details, but it was probably during Kingship of Hezekiah. Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, wasn't thought to be especially close to the kings. He writes a timeless word of covenant relationship, as one commentator, John Collins, called it, "Biblical ethics in a nutshell." Nature brought in to bear witness, because ethics are a matter of cosmic proportion. We know that is true when we consider the importance of climate justice and creation care.

When Micah says God has a complaint, I think it's more of- "didn't I accompany you?" rather than that perennial- "After all I've done for you!"

God delivered them from slavery in Egypt, a formative story in the life of the people. And how wonderful that at a time when women's leadership wasn't especially valued, Miriam makes it on the list. *When I redeemed you from the house of slavery. I sent before you Moses, Aaron, Miriam.*

(Just a brief word about the other references- somewhat obscure.)

King Balak intending a curse upon the people, hires Balaam to do so, but a blessing is pronounced upon them instead. And the place names Barbara read might be similar to saying, from New Lebanon to Clermont, from Austerlitz to Stockport. They are shorthand coordinates of the Promised Land.

And the people's immediate response? What **thing** does God want from me? The list continues to increase, to the point of hyperbole- 10,000 rivers of oil and then a qualitative sacrifice- my first born.

No, you've got it all wrong!!! That's a loose translation of what the Prophet Micah says.

**God has shown you, o mortal what is good. What does the Lord require of you?**

Abolitionist Frederick Douglass said, "Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did. It never will."

Here's where being a misfit might come in-

The demand placed upon us is internal. It is because we are claimed by something greater than ourselves, to see ourselves in community and in relationship with God.

What does the lord require of you? What do we require of ourselves and one another?

Another understanding of loving God and neighbor. To DO justice- not just talk about it; to

love HESED- too full a word for 1 English word- it is mercy, kindness, love, loyalty; to walk reverently, in relationship with Divine presence. An external demand may be temporary and based in fear. But an internal demand- a conviction that we are more whole together- that leads to transformation. And indeed, such a conviction- not self-serving but self-giving does invite us to be misfits leaning into a Kin-dom of God. For the misfits among us and the building of such a crowd as that!

You know how some moments are very full? Last Tuesday, I went again to Homeland Security, along with 2 other clergy at the request of Columbia County Sanctuary Movement to pray and stand in solidarity with Miguel, as I did before. He lives in Kinderhook with his family. He has a wife and 5 children, at least one of whom was born here. He is trying to stay, He was whisked inside, so we prayed aloud together, stood in the cold for 45 minutes. It seemed a small thing. He did not get deported this time, and we will go back again, as long as necessary. When Miguel came outside and was introduced to the other clergy, they shook hands. He then turned to me and said – “I know you. Give me a hug!”

Sometimes it comes down to one person at a time, one act at a time, one conviction at a time.

“Because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the good I can do. “

I encourage us all to ponder this week on the ways we are called to do justice, to love loving-kindness, mercy and to be aware of our reverent walk with the Holy One. Amen.

The Beatitudes from Matthew’s Gospel also invite us into good ethics in relation to God and one another. Now, we sing about them.