

Scripture: Micah 6:1-8  
Message: Walking with God  
November 5, 2017; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON  
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summons to the people. The witnesses have been called upon. The court is called to order as the judge presents his accusation.

The judge is God himself. The witnesses are the mountains and the hills. We are the people God calls upon. The accusation is that God's people are not faithfully carrying out their responsibilities before God.

Remember God's Grand Story. Abraham and his descendants, which includes us through faith in Jesus, would be in relationship with God. God promised to bless them so they would be a blessing to others (Genesis 12). Remember how God called his people his special treasure, and that they would live in priestly service and obedient holiness. They were set apart to show God's presence and power to people around them (Exodus 19).

God is now justified in raising and presenting his accusation. God has made many covenant promises to us, his people. As his people who accept those promises, we pledge ourselves to thankful faithfulness. God keeps his side of the covenant. When we don't live up to our side, God challenges our actions. He takes his people to court.

God has some reliable witnesses to back up his case. He has called on the mountains and the hills. They are the everlasting foundations of the earth. They were present when Israel committed themselves to obedience in the covenant. They have seen the people's behaviour ever since, both their obedience and the rebellious disobedience, their faithfulness to God and their corruption. Nothing is hidden or secret.

Before God lays down his specific charges (vv. 9-16), he seems to back off a bit. In v.3 God raises the possibility that maybe *he* has done something wrong. God claims to search his *own* heart and actions. Can it be his *own fault* that his people have cooled in their affections toward him, that they have lost their enthusiasm in serving him?

Then God answers his own question. Picking highlights from Israel's history God shows what he has done. God begins with the exodus from Egypt. This was as significant for Israel as the cross and resurrection is for us today. This was proof of God's love and saving power.

From this deliverance God shows how he provided leaders for the people. God points to his providential care in delivering his people from the sly schemes of enemy Balak and Balaam.

Then there is the crossing of the Jordan into Canaan, from Shittim on the east side to Gilgal on the west, into Canaan itself. Only by God's grace and power did Israel make it that far.

In a personal way God invokes his people to think through these events. "My people, remember! My people remember." God wants to jog our memories to look at what he has done

in and for us. Remember that Jesus Christ left the glory of heaven to be like us. Remember that he suffered the pain of rejection and the pain of death on a cross to pay for our sins. Remember that God raised him from the dead and received him into heaven to assure us of our victory over sin and death. My people, remember that the Holy Spirit has been sent to us, to live and work in us, to confirm God's presence with us and within us.

Remember how God sent that friend to you to talk to you and encourage you when you felt so hopeless and helpless. Remember how God provided money for groceries seemingly out of nowhere when you had no more food in the house. Remember how God helped you through that difficult situation and turned it into a good, positive event for you. God pleads, "My people, remember what I have done. Have I done anything wrong? How have I burdened you? Answer me!"

There are no valid charges to bring against God. The only conclusion is that we are guilty as charged. We have no legitimate grounds for taking advantage of our neighbour, for cheating in our business deals. There is no justification for the rich to arrange that they get richer while the poor get poorer. There is no excuse for selfishness, for ignoring God's Word or paying it lip-service, no excuse for compromise to make life comfortable.

In the specific charges later in the chapter (vv.10-11) God speaks of dishonest scales. This refers to buying and selling in the market place. But how about the scales or standards we use in our treatment of others? Are you using honest scales in your attitudes to minorities or less-privileged? Are you using honest scales in the priorities you set for your personal spending or in your business decisions? Do you look down on those who are less advantaged, who do not have brand-name logos on their clothes?

The only conclusion is "guilty as charged." That is how each one of us stands before God. God could read off a long list of accusations and indictments against each of us and we would have no answer except to admit our guilt.

What do we do when we find out that we are guilty? One thing to do is to try to get back into the good books of the person we offended by doing all sorts of nice things for them. For Israel this would have been done through sacrifices. How about a burnt offering, the most valuable of all because the whole animal was sacrificed? How about thousands of rams? Or 10,000 rivers of oil? Not just the tiny bit that was usually offered but rivers of oil!

The growing crescendo of greater sacrifices reaches a climax in the offer to sacrifice one's own son: my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul.

Have I offended you, God? Let me buy back your favour. What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? How can I pay him back for what he has done and to cover my wrong? It is the attitude that we owe God something, as if we can pay him something to make him like us, or to pay something toward our salvation. But that is impossible.

There is another direction we can go after admitting that we are guilty; that is to turn to the free grace of God. It is to admit our wrong and throw ourselves to the mercy and love of a compassionate judge. Then we are free from trying to earn our good standing before God, which is an exercise in futility. We are free from the guilt of our past sins because God has forgiven them and wiped them away in Christ. Then we are free to joyfully carry out what is good and what the Lord requires because we want to thank him. Then the question "What shall I render to the Lord?" does not suggest payment to God, but as the psalm/song properly says, "How shall my soul, by grace restored, give worthy thanks, O Lord, to you?"

Then we will act justly as God requires. God expects justice for all. This means no favouritism for one part of society over against another. Everyone must be treated as they deserve; respected as an image-bearer of God and have equal opportunity to the rights and privileges which are offered. This means justice for the unborn that they too have their right to live. It means justice for First Nations people and other racial minorities that they have access to education and employment and clean drinking water and fairness in the courts. It means justice for the small business who faces unfair competition from a large corporation. The rich must act justly in their treatment of the poor whether that be at the level of world nations or dealing with the poor among us. To act justly is a commitment to a society where there is equality and fairness.

God requires us to love mercy. Mercy includes compassion, kindness. God gives the perfect example of this in his dealings with us. God is merciful in not rejecting us whenever we sin, in forgiving us when we repent. God is merciful in keeping his promises of the covenant even when we so often break our side of responsibility.

God expects the people who experience his mercy to also love mercy in their relationships with others. Treat people in the way we want them to treat us. Forgive as God in Christ has forgiven us. Be understanding when someone disagrees with you. Show kindness, even to those who are not kind to you. Be compassionate and caring to those who are in need, whether down the road or across the ocean.

And we must *love* mercy. Desire it greatly. This means more than simply going through the motions of mercy. It is to love it, to enjoy doing it. Therefore mercy is not shown grudgingly, or as a duty or only when there is personal advantage. To love mercy means it has to be part of our character, as if it is second nature and we easily or automatically will be merciful in dealing with others. God's mercy is alive in and through us.

Third we are required to walk humbly with our God. To walk with someone you must agree with them. There must be some relationship, some bond of fellowship. Walking together means being in the presence of that person. This is all true of our walk with God. As a friend, as Father and child, we walk together in fellowship with God.

It is walking humbly. We don't lead the way or tell God where we should go. We recognize that we don't deserve to be walking with him, yet he accepts us whole-heartedly in Christ. So we let God lead. The entire direction or walk of our life is determined by God as we walk in step with him. Even if we don't see what is around the next corner or beyond the next hill we trust completely in God and continue walking with him. We go where God would go. We walk with the hurting, the poor, the sick, those who others may wish to avoid.

The case has been presented. We have heard the verdict declared, "Guilty!" The sentence is punishment, but that has been served by Jesus Christ. We do not need to, and we cannot, pay for our guilt. Jesus has done that for us. As we leave today, what is our response to the judge? Are we going to sigh in relief that we got out of that one and go on living as if it doesn't mean a thing? What an offense to a gracious Judge.

Let us respond with thankful and joyful commitment to do the good that God has shown us. Let us eagerly carry out what God requires: To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. Apply this in specific, practical ways in decisions about your spending of money or time, in your treatment of others, in your working for justice. God wants you, your whole life committed to living for and with him.

Here are five things that we can consider:

1. Believe God put you here for a purpose and he wants to use you.
2. Recognize that everything you do matters—every kind word, every approving look, every helping hand, every penny sacrificed in love—it all matters.
3. Take personal responsibility. Never think, "It's not my job" or "what can I do?" or "now is not the right time." You can do something, now.
4. The beginning of change is awareness. Be informed. Know what's going on in the world beyond your own front door.
5. In order for things to change, *you* have to change. We can't change others. We can only change ourselves...and when we change, when we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God, *that* changes everything.

How will you show that you are walking with God?

Amen.