



Holy Disruption: Ancient Prophets for Modern Times—Micah
 Rev. Dr. Glenda Hollingshead; July 12, 2026
 Micah 6:1-8; Matthew 25:31-40

If there is one verse from the Minor Prophets that church people recognize—even if they can't remember where it comes from—it's Micah 6:8: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Those words have found their way onto church banners, coffee mugs, graduation gifts, and many a mission statement. They are beautiful words. Familiar words. But familiarity has a way of taming words that were never meant to be tame. Micah is not offering a sentimental saying for greeting cards or wall art. He is confronting a nation in crisis with God's call to justice, mercy, and humility.

Micah is from a small farming village about twenty miles outside of Jerusalem. Unlike the political and religious leaders who live in the capital city, the prophet knows about rural life. He sees firsthand what happens when wealthy landowners seize family farms, when judges accept bribes, when prophets tell people only what they want to hear, and when rulers enrich themselves while ordinary people struggle to survive. He prophesies during the latter half of the eighth century alongside Isaiah and Hosea, addressing both the northern kingdom of Israel and

the southern kingdom of Judah. As we have already learned from this sermon series, it is a time of prosperity for some but profound injustice for many others.

On the surface, worship and religious festivals are going on as usual. Yet beneath the appearance of faithfulness there is corruption, exploitation, violence, and idolatry. It seems the people believe they can honor God with their lips while ignoring their neighbors, but Micah warns they cannot. And history proves him right. Israel ignores the prophets and falls to the Assyrians in 722 BC, while under the leadership of King Hezekiah, Judah experiences a season of reform and is spared for another century.

The book itself moves like a series of waves. Again and again, Micah announces judgment against injustice, then follows it with hope. He condemns dishonest leaders and false prophets, but he also paints breathtaking pictures of God's future—a day when swords become plowshares, nations learn war no more, and people sit beneath their own vines and fig trees with no one to make them afraid. Against this backdrop of judgment and hope, chapter six opens with a striking courtroom scene in which God brings a lawsuit against Israel and calls the mountains and the hills as witnesses. "My people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you?" God asks. Then comes a reminder of grace before any accusation. "I brought you up from the land of Egypt." "I redeemed you." "I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam before you." God rehearses a history of faithfulness. That's significant because before God asks anything of the people, God reminds them of what God has already done for them.

The people respond almost frantically. "With what shall I come before the Lord?" Should we bring burnt offerings? Calves a year old? Thousands of rams? Rivers of oil? They even ask the unthinkable: should we sacrifice our firstborn child? Notice what is happening. The people assume the problem can be solved by doing more for God. More sacrifices. More offerings. More religious performance. And Micah responds with remarkable simplicity. "He has told you, O mortal, what is good." In other words, this is not a mystery. God has already made God's heart known.

"Do justice." Justice in Scripture is never merely about punishment. It's about making relationships right. It means ensuring that everyone, especially those with the least power, is treated with dignity and fairness. It means refusing to look away when others are harmed. Justice asks not simply whether I am doing well but whether my neighbor is able to flourish alongside me.

Then Micah instructs, "Love kindness." The Hebrew word is *hesed*, one of the richest words in the Old Testament. It is often translated as steadfast love, covenant faithfulness, lovingkindness, or mercy. It is the kind of love God continually extends toward Israel despite their repeated failures. Micah says we are not merely to practice kindness occasionally but to *love it*—to delight in mercy, to become people whose first instinct is compassion.

Finally, "Walk humbly with your God." Notice that Micah does not tell us to run or to achieve or to impress. He simply says to walk. Faith is less about dramatic spiritual accomplishments than about the ordinary, daily practice of staying close to God. Humility is about recognizing that we are not the center of the universe. It's about listening before speaking, serving before demanding, and remembering that every gift we possess comes from God's gracious hand.

Justice. Kindness. Humility. Not three separate commands but three strands woven into a single life of faith.

Jesus echoes this same vision in Matthew 25 when he tells the story of the sheep and the goats. The surprise in the parable is that no one realizes they have encountered Christ. They meet him disguised as the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner. The measure of faith is not found in religious performance but in compassionate action. "Just as you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me."

Micah and Jesus are saying the same thing. Love of God always finds expression in love of neighbor.

It is tempting to hear Micah as if he were speaking only to ancient Judah, condemning injustices safely locked away in history. But prophets refuse to remain in the past. They insist on asking uncomfortable questions of every generation. Where are people being crushed beneath systems of power? Whose voices are ignored? Who is denied dignity, safety, or belonging? Who is treated as disposable? Wherever poverty is dismissed as a personal failure, wherever the vulnerable are exploited, whenever any child of God is devalued because of the circumstances of their birth, the bodies they inhabit, the communities they belong to, or the identities they carry, Micah's words echo once more: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

So, in our own day, what might this look like? What is ours to do? What is ours to say? Is it wise for us to speak up at all? There are moments when the safest and easiest path for the church seems to be silence. Yet the prophets remind us that silence can become another way of accepting injustice. The church is not called to baptize an ideology or pledge allegiance to a political party. We are called to bear witness to God's unwavering concern for those Scripture repeatedly lifts before us—the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the poor, and all who live without power. Whenever those neighbors are forgotten, excluded, or harmed, Micah calls God's people to remember who we are and whose we are.

Most of the time, this calling looks less dramatic than we might think. Justice begins when we refuse to speak in ways that diminish another person. Justice grows when we advocate for someone whose voice has been ignored, when we choose compassion over suspicion, and when we stand alongside those who are vulnerable. Kindness appears in the patient conversation, the

handwritten note, the meal delivered without fanfare, the willingness to forgive when resentment would be easier. Humility is cultivated every time we admit we do not have all the answers, every time we choose listening over winning, and every time we remember that following Jesus is a lifelong journey rather than a destination that we have already reached.

Again and again, the prophets remind us that God has never desired impressive rituals apart from transformed lives. God desires people whose worship shapes the way they treat others, whose prayer deepens their compassion, and whose walk with God leaves footprints of justice, mercy, and humility. That is what the Lord requires. And by God's grace and by the power of God's Spirit, it is also what the Lord makes possible. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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