

“Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly”
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana
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Micah 6: 1-8

At the beginning of December, Lisa and I attended the funeral for Rev. Ann Noland in Anderson. Ann had been serving as pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Greenfield. She suffered an embolism and died unexpectedly at the age of 65. She had been a life-long Presbyterian, having grown up in the church in Anderson. She was also a second-career pastor, spending most of her life serving in the medical field, but then attending and graduating from Christian Theological Seminary in 2016. First Church in Greenfield was her first and only call as an ordained pastor, but Ann served the church her entire life as a leader, teacher, and servant of Christ.

I had never met Ann, and Lisa had only spent time with her a month earlier at a conference they both attended. But we both felt it was important to go and be present with those who are, in essence, our congregation: the presbytery. For me as a minister of Word and Sacrament, the presbytery is where my church membership belongs, and as we gathered with Ann’s friends and family, there were many of us ruling and teaching elders who also came to bear witness to her resurrection. I have to admit it was nice for once to be a participant at a funeral service, instead of being the one who was presiding.

What struck me about Ann’s funeral was that we read this passage from Micah at her service. I have a collection of scriptures that I will often suggest to family members for a funeral service, if they don’t have ones already picked out. Romans 8, John 14, Psalm 23, Matthew 5, and so on. But Micah 6:8 has never been one of those suggested readings. As I heard it read in the context of witnessing to the resurrection, it took on a whole new meaning.

“He 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?” We are all mortal – we will not live forever in this world. So, with this life that we have been given at this time, what does the Lord expect from us? Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with our God. It may sound like a bumper sticker motto – but it is so much deeper than that. And I learned on that day in December, this passage was what guided Rev. Ann Noland in her lifetime of faith and service as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, it’s usually at times of grief and death that we are forced to look in the mirror and take account of where we stand in light of this requirement of God’s. We’ve witnessed that self-reflection on a local level for our church, with the funerals of Betty Stephanoff and Janet Pitcock over the last two weeks. And we have witnessed that self-reflection on a national level, with the sudden death of Kobe Bryant, his daughter, and seven other adults and children in a helicopter crash in California last Sunday. When someone

dies, we not only reflect on the life of the saint we are remembering, we also find ourselves asking, "Have I done what God requires of me? What more should I be doing?"

What would it look like if we didn't wait until these end-of-life moments to examine what God requires of us? How would it change our lives if we asked ourselves every day, "What does God require of me today?" How are we called to shake ourselves from the comforts of routine, and instead do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God?

In our text today, the people of Israel had become very comfortable, and God is calling his people to court. God wants them to take account for what they have done in relation to their covenant with him. God has established a covenant with the people which calls for a response by Israel, a response of trust, gratitude and obedience. Yet Israel has not shown such a response, instead causing "a controversy" between God and God's people.

The Lord calls on all of creation to hear this complaint: "Hear, you mountains, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel" (6:2). And then, God reminds Israel of all that has been done for them by their creator: "I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from slavery; and I send before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam" (6:4). The Lord saved Israel throughout history, keeping them safe and secure. Now, as Israel faces their exile into Babylon, the Lord shows his exasperation.

The people of Israel have broken God's heart. God has given them so much, sheltered them from harm, and formed a covenant with his children. And while they say all the right things - in their worship and teachings - they have failed to live according to what they say. Worship has become an escape from the real world, and they have neglected to allow God's Word to penetrate their daily living. That is what can happen when we become so concerned with saying all the right things, while failing to do all the right things.

One commentator writes: *In fact, Micah himself warns of this danger and the judgment that follows the community that becomes skilled at "talking the talk" but not "walking the walk." The "talk" that Micah critiques in this eighth-century BCE is the exclusive attention paid to the cultic practices of religious faith, without the ethical obedience that faith in Yahweh requires. "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?" The question is posed in the cultic arena that Micah deprecates. An escalating list of potential offerings is offered. Burnt offerings? Calves a year-old? Thousands of rams? Ten thousand rivers of oil? My firstborn? Micah's answer, of course, is that none of these symbols of sacrifice pleases God when they are stripped from the context that gives them meaning. God desires more than empty words. God desires justice that is measured by how well the most vulnerable fare in the community, a loyal love that is commensurate with the kind of loyal love that God has shown toward Israel, and a careful walking in*

one's ethical life (*Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 1*, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, © 2010: 284-286).

What the Lord requires of us is not just what we do within these walls. Last Sunday, each of the women and men who stood before you as elders and deacons for the church in the years ahead were asked the following question: "Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?" In other words, as they serve as officers of this church, they are expected to live every day of their life as faithful disciples of Christ, not just when they are at 3000 North High School Road. Micah would ask that question to all of us, for we truly are expected to not only talk the talk, but also to walk the walk.

And while celebrations in life are important and appropriate to give thanks for God's goodness, they are not an excuse to then relax and believe we have accomplished all that God requires of us. At our annual meeting last Sunday, we had the great joy of announcing that we were in a position to pay off the remaining balance of our mortgage. We wrote a check in the amount of \$307,000, and myself, Cindy Hiday, and Judy Ricketts delivered it on Tuesday to the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program in Louisville. A journey that began more than ten years ago with a total cost of \$1.5 million has now come to an end.

Does that mean, then, that we have done all that the Lord requires of us? Does that mean we can sit back and not give like we have been? Does that mean we are comfortable and can now relax?

I hope not. I hope instead of contentment we are motivated now to do more. I hope we recognize what an incredible opportunity we have been given as a community of faith, so we might be an even brighter light of God to this world. I hope we are inspired to dream, to work, to be an Open. Caring. Community, which does justice, loves kindness, and walks humbly with our Lord.

What the Lord requires of us is to embody his coming kingdom. What the Lord requires of us is not to forget the lessons of hope and love and justice we preach and teach in the church. What the Lord requires of us is to make those lessons come alive – in our relations with fellow Christians, in our dialogue with people of other faiths, in our relations with friends and strangers alike.

What does the Lord require of us? To show in flesh and blood what God's coming kingdom truly is: the in-breaking of God's mercy and justice, so that the light of the world might illumine the darkness of this world.

As we leave this place today, may we not only talk the talk, but also walk the walk of faith, doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly everyday with the Lord our God. Amen.