

Pastor T.C. Arnold
22nd Sunday after Trinity
Micah 6:6-8
November 16th, 2014

Those of you who REALLY know me know that there are three women in my life: My beloved mother, my precious and lovely wife, and Judge Judy. I don't know what it is about her. I love the way she controls the courtroom with her "no nonsense" style. Everyone knows who's in charge when they step into that court of law.

There is a "no nonsense" court of law depicted at the beginning of Micah chapter 6, our Old Testament reading appointed for this day. In this court the Israelites are the defendant and God is the plaintiff bringing charges against the people. The charge is this: "failure to do what God requires." As you may also guess, God is also the judge and jury.

The same can be said about the people of God today – you and me. You, the defendant, have been indicted by the Lord, the plaintiff, with the charge, "failure to do what God requires." At the beginning of the chapter, which was not read this morning, the plaintiff addresses you, the defendant, with questions, "*O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam...*" and the plaintiff goes on like that for a couple more verses. In other words, the plaintiff is telling the defendant that he has kept his end of the bargain. Why have you not kept yours? Why have you remained in your sin? Why have you bowed to other gods and ignored the one true Lord? He says, "*Why do you break my laws and turn a blind eye to the covenant we made – you will be my people and I will be your God?*"

And then, in this court of law, you, the defendant, have the opportunity to speak. This speech from the defendant is what we hear in the Old Testament text appointed for today. "*With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come with burnt offerings...? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression...?*" God is "God on High" as it says in the text. He is way up here and we are way down there. So, if I'm going to come into the Lord's presence I better bring some presents. How about a burnt offering? That is a common sacrifice – a gift to the Lord. What about an offering of thousands of rams and ten thousands of rivers of oil? That's an extraordinary gift for sure. How about what it says in our text, "*Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*" Now that is crossing the line. That is absurd. There is no way God would ask such valuable thing. You can't take the "three" (really two) women of my life – and you can't take my two boys in my life either. There is no way that God could be serious about that one. That cannot be the price of my sins. My firstborn (and my second born) is truly the most prized possession I have.

Tell that to Abraham. He knows. Remember how God put him to the test? He wasn't paying for his sins with the price of his son Isaac, but rather demonstrating faithfulness. Abraham took his son Isaac to the top of Mt. Moriah and did as the Lord instructed. He built an altar and put his first born son – his only son – the son that he loved (it says) on that altar. He readied himself. He picked up that dagger to plunge into the heart of his son – because the Lord told him to. But was stopped. Stopped by the Lord who said you need not go any further with this demonstration of faithfulness. You have proven yourself worthy and faithful.

For Abraham, great pain and anguish would have been brought upon him and his family if such an act would have been carried out. I'm sure the pain was great to even think about such a thing. But it was a great faith Abraham had. Death of our first born surely couldn't be the price for sins, could it? "*Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression?*" the defendant replies to the accusations of the plaintiff. No, that can't be the price for sins. That's unreasonable. That's beyond what I could bare. That seems tremendously over-the-top. That can't be the price for my sins because that means the one I love the most has to do die – in the place of me – for my sins. That can't be the way it is.

That's exactly the way it is. But it's not your firstborn son that will be sacrificed. It's His firstborn Son – The Son. Beloved, if we look back on the story of Abraham and Isaac and carefully consider what took place, we will see that Abraham—we call him Father Abraham – typified our heavenly Father in willingness to give His son in order to show how he is faithful. You see, it all comes down to this: the plaintiff, the judge and the jury is faithful, remains faithful, and will be faithful to the end. The defendant, you and me, fall short of the kind of faithfulness that is expected of us. Abraham, because he was faithful, would give his son at the request of the Lord. Our heavenly Father, because He is faithful to His promise, would not withhold His only begotten Son Jesus from suffering and death for the sake of the ones He loves.

You are guilty. So am I. We deserve eternal death for our sins. The plaintiff has an open and shut case. There is no way we stand up to it. Our love turns away from the women and men in our lives to something that – at the time – seems more important and is always very selfish. Our loves turns away from our promise to keep God first when the love of our bed, the love of laziness, the love of indifference, the love of "let someone else to it, I don't want to be troubled," the love of telling ourselves and the Lord, "I don't have anything to offer. I'm good at nothing." The love whatever makes God second on that list of priorities for your day, for your week and for your month – yes, even the love of football. You are guilty and so am I. We deserve the strictest punishment. The accuser quickly and easily built an air-tight case.

Don't live as if you love those things more than you love the Lord. Live for the Lord. Live in His grace and strength. He lived for you. When we ask, "Shall I give my first-born?" He says, I already have. The Father in heaven was silent when His Son was asking for that painful and bitter cup to be taken from Him when He prayed for the Father's mercy in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus had His answer – He would be the sacrifice for all sins. It's in that cup that we have every blessing today. It's in that cup we have His body and blood and we have life because the Father would not withhold His Son for us. We have grace poured out on us like we will see six times this morning (10:45 A.M. Service there are six baptisms). We live for God because He lived and died for us.

The judge now looks at you through the blood of His Son. The accusations against you are true and worthy to be punished. But you won't be – not eternally. By grace through faith the jury has found you not guilty because of Jesus. He keeps His covenant of promise. He keeps His Word, for you!! Look how He loves us. Look what He would do for us. God has taken you to court and set you free – free from guilt, free from self-condemnation, free "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Who is a God like the Lord? Case dismissed! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.