

January 29, 2017
Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Micah 6:1-8

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Micah 6:1–8 (ESV)

¹ Hear what the LORD says: Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice.
² Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth, for the LORD has an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel. ³ “O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me! ⁴ 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. ⁵ O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.” ⁶ “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” ⁸ He has told you, O man, 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?

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Do you remember playing hide-and-seek when you were kids? One person was “it” and everyone else would run and hide. The person who was “it” would cover his eyes, and depending on their age would count to 25, 50 or one hundred and then would call out “Ready or not, here I come.”

We are in the season of Epiphany. The emphasis of Epiphany is the revealing of Jesus as the Savior of all people, not just the Jewish people. However, today’s Old Testament reading leads us to think about the question, “As we live out our Christian lives, are we truly prepared for Jesus to return as the judge of all people?” This is the question Micah was asking God’s people of his day.

Jesus said He would return like a thief in the night. (Mt 24:43, 1 Thess 5:2)

In other words, no one knows when that time will be. Therefore, the question Micah asked those Israelites is the question he is asking us today – are we ready to hear Jesus say, “Ready or not, here I come.” Let’s apply Micah’s words to our lives today.

God’s grace enables us to be ready for the future.

God opens his complaint against the Israelites with the question in verse three: “*O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you?*” (Mic 6:3).

God wants to know why His people have treated Him so poorly. Instead of offering thanksgiving for all the good things God had done for them, the Israelites forgot God and engaged in idolatry, intermarried with pagan people, and broke all of the commandments God had set before them.

Next, God presents a few examples of times when He covered the people with His grace. After over 400 years of slavery, God rescued His people from Egyptian slavery with mighty miracles.

And, as a grand finale, God parted the Red Sea to let His people cross in safety and to destroy Pharaoh's army.

God engineered the life of Moses. He gave Moses the finest education possible in the court of Pharaoh. At age 40, he fled Egypt and then God gave Moses 40 years of desert training while he tended his father-in-law's sheep. Then, when Moses was fully prepared, God took Moses back to Egypt at 80 years of age to bring the Israelites out to freedom.

When Balak, king of Moab, bribed Balaam to curse the Israelites, God protected His people by instructing Balaam what He would have him do. When Balaam decided to help king Balak anyway, the Angel of God stood in the road. Balaam's donkey saw the Angel and refused to take Balaam any farther and God's people were saved (Num 22).

God concluded his argument by reminding the people how he had given them Joshua to lead them into the promised land and conquer the promised land.

The grace God had shown the Israelites in the past was the foundation for them to believe His promises of grace for the future. God promised His people deliverance.

Not just physical deliverance, but also spiritual deliverance.

Micah 2:12-13 (ESV) ¹² *I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will gather the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men. ... Their king passes on before them, the Lord at their head."*

Micah 5:2 (ESV) ² *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."*

So, what about the grace that God has shown to us – His New Testament people?

Can we look at our past and have hope for the future?

God's grace was showered down on us in our baptism. Through baptism God brought us into His family. We became His children. He became our Father. And faith, the gift of the Holy Spirit, became ours.

After our baptism, God continues to shower His grace on us through the teaching and preaching of His Word. Today, before we leave here, God will once again show us His grace in the body and blood of Jesus as we celebrate Holy Communion.

God has showered blessings on this church. Through the 100 plus years, thousands of people have come here to worship. Lives have been changed in this very building. Children and adults have been baptized and taught God's Word. This church has stood, and still stands, as a beacon of God's love for the people of Montague and surrounding counties.

God has been as good and faithful to us as He was to those Israelites of long ago. And, like those Israelites, because of God's grace in the past, we can trust God's promise of grace for the future.

Matthew 28:20 *Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

Romans 8:28 *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

John 14:1-3 *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

Our response to all of this indicates whether we are ready or not.

Not in the way that we decide that we are ready and we proudly call out to God, "I've done it, I'm ready, but rather our readiness shows in our lives.

In Micah's time, God asked His people, "How will you respond to my grace?"

God asks us the same question. Our response will either be positive or negative. And it really doesn't come from our mouths. If we compare our actions, our lives, with those of the Israelites, we will find the answer.

A negative response says we are not ready for Jesus to return. The Israelites gave God a negative response. The Israelites had plunged themselves into works of religious rites and rituals. They convinced themselves that God cared more about the things they did than the condition of their hearts and their faith.

From our Text we read: **Micah 6:6-7** *"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"*

That was Micah's day, but things weren't any better by the time Jesus walked the earth. The Jews of that day were still more interested in their tradition than their God. They told Jesus: *"We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"* (Jn 8:33 NIV).

We shake our heads at these things. We accuse the Israelites of trying to bribe God with earthly offerings and earthly traditions. But we can fall into the same trap.

When we think that God is impressed by our liturgy, our church attendance, and even our offerings, we might just as well sacrifice a few sheep and goats and brag about our proud Lutheran heritage and our 124 year congregational history.

If we are to make a positive response for all that God has done and will do for us, we must pay careful attention to the last verse of today's reading: *"He [God] has told you, O man, 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?"* (Mic 6:8 ESV).

This one command proved to be too much for the Israelites of old. Sadly, it is still beyond the grasp of most people today. To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God, is a huge command. Only with the grace and by the help of God can someone even try to live the life God expects from us.

To act justly means to lead godly lives. God wants us to be examples for the rest of the world. He wants purity, honesty, and integrity from us. He wants the unbelieving world to feel His love radiating from us.

To love mercy is to be tolerant and forgiving. While we are never tolerant of evil, we can always be tolerant and forgiving with people who are stumbling around in the darkness of sin.

We can always love the sinner, while we hate the sin. We can be tolerant and forgiving with our sisters and brothers in Christ, when they stumble; just as we want them to be tolerant and forgiving with us when we stumble.

To walk humbly with your God is to force pride and arrogance out of your life. It's to say with the apostle Paul: "*May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Ga 6:14).

Like the ancient Israelites, we need to be reminded not to take God's mercy and grace for granted. We need to do more than just go through the motions of faith.

We need to embrace humility not pride.

We must show mercy, not claim merit.

We need to live by faith, not by sight.

We need to boast only in Jesus, never in ourselves.

We need to worship in sincerity, not artificially.

We need to trust in the Lord, not in ourselves.

God's grace enables us to face the future and eternity with hope and joy, knowing we are ready for Jesus when He comes.

If, today, Jesus says, "Ready or not, here I come," our answer will be:

"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." (Re 22:20 NIV).

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and mind through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria-To God alone be the Glory