

Date: January 31, 2021  
Title: "Micah the Passionate Prophet"  
Scripture: Micah 2:1-13  
Preacher: Rev. Robert Dean

We are in the middle of a sermon series that is based on a simple concept: Where can we find inspiration if we are going to be living through challenging days? Unless you have been off planet for the past year, you probably know that these are not the easiest days for people. We survived through a rocky election year, continue to battle a pandemic, and each face our own challenges. Where can we find inspiration?

As Christians, we believe that the scriptures hold wisdom for us as a people. We believe that the scriptures are useful for teaching us wise ways to live, so we return to the scriptures regularly.<sup>1</sup> As a people going through difficult days, we can probably use as many good examples as we can find, so we are looking at Biblical figures who went through difficult times and continued in faith through all of their challenges. Not every figure in the scriptures survived their challenges, but many of them survived to leave us powerful examples of how we can live with integrity through difficult days.

Most of the figures we are considering have a clear story, but the prophets are problematic. Many of the prophetic works are snapshots out of a life of ministry. The prophetic works we have today have been passed forward through time as a part of our scriptures, but they are not narrative works. Most of what we know of the prophets comes down to what we can glean from their writings and from the rare moments they or people in their stories show up in other Books of the Bible.

Today we are considering Micah. The Book of Micah dates itself during the reign of several kings of Judah. If the dating is correct, then Micah lived at the same time as the prophet Isaiah. We do not often think about how prophets lived and served at the same time, but Micah's story took place at the same time as Isaiah. As most of our historical data about the time in the scriptures comes from the Book of 2 Kings and 2 Kings focuses on Isaiah, we do not know the clear end to Micah's journey. We do know that few prophets lived easy lives and many died, but we do not have a clear understanding of what happened to Micah.

What we do know is that we have Micah's story to tell us about this Biblical figure and especially what he believed. Perhaps your first thought when you think of Micah comes from the sixth chapter. Micah's words in Micah 6:8 are read often, have been found on wall plaques, and are quoted a lot in certain circles. What are those words?

"[God]<sup>2</sup> has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16

<sup>2</sup> "He" in Hebrew

but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?”<sup>3</sup>

At first glance, Micah’s theology seems pretty straightforward. Micah believes that God wants us to be just, kind, and humble. To be honest with you, the first glance holds pretty firm through a lot of glances. A study of Micah shows concern about people being just, kind, and humble throughout the book.

In the third chapter of Micah, there’s strong condemnation of all the people who have plenty to eat and cry “peace” while at the same time bringing violence to the hungry and those who have nothing. There’s also condemnation for the ruler that takes bribes, the priests who only teach for a profit, and the prophets who will only share God’s word when paid.<sup>4</sup> The sixth chapter condemns merchants who are dishonest, the violence of the rich, and the widespread lack of honesty.<sup>5</sup> The seventh chapter brings judgment against friends and families that turn on each other as well as the powerful who thrive while perverting justice.<sup>6</sup> Micah is nothing if not consistent in challenging the people who assume that their own self-interest will rule the day.

Consider what we have read today. Micah paints the world (and especially the wicked people he is addressing) as being full of the self-centered and brutal. There are people who live wicked lives according to Micah. The wicked are seen as covetous and greedy. The wicked oppress the people while grasping at what was not meant to belong to the wicked. The wicked would take even the holy inheritance established by God from the poor. The people are suffering and according to Micah, God won’t stand for it. Even as powerful people cry out for Micah to stop saying such things and even as the wicked call out that God’s inheritance should stand regardless of the people’s behavior, Micah continues to preach. Micah refuses to be silenced.

For Micah, the problem is clear: The wicked are fleecing the peaceful, the violent are oppressing the women and children. This situation seems to infuriate Micah and Micah’s God is mad as well.

One of the things I personally love about Micah is that Micah is not a book or prophecy of nuance. For Micah, there’s right and there’s wrong in the world. If you spend enough time in the Bible, there are a lot of occasions where you have to be careful with what you say. Take King David as an example: 1 Samuel 13:14 says that David is a man after God’s own heart. This seems straightforward until we find David staying home while his army is at war and sleeping with the wife of one of his soldiers before he sends a message to get the woman’s husband killed in 2 Samuel 11. As a preacher, it is always interesting to say one Sunday “You should be like King David: he was so brave when facing Goliath” only to have to say another

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<sup>3</sup> Micah 6:8, NRSV

<sup>4</sup> Micah 3:5, 11

<sup>5</sup> Micah 6:11-12

<sup>6</sup> Micah 7:5-6, 3

Sunday “You shouldn’t be like King David: he was so underhanded when dealing with his soldier Uriah.”

Micah doesn’t have that problem. One of the joys of having a prophet’s words without the narrative is that we have a presentation of the prophet at their best. Just as there were moments when David was at his best, there are moments when Micah was a wonderful prophet. Throughout time, when all of the winnowing of history passed over the stories of Micah passed from generation to generation, this is what we hope remains: the kernel of what Micah stood for as a prophet and hopefully the kernel of what God wanted people to know.

Micah was passionate about the fact that the world might not be fair, but that God was working to set things right. Micah’s passion comes through clearly in what has been passed down to us throughout time. When we consider the context of where Micah is set in the scriptures, there’s clearly a reason for this passion. Micah 1:1 establishes that Micah served during the reign of Kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah. What were those kings like as leaders? 2 Kings 16 tells us that Jotham worshipped other gods, which isn’t great. His son Ahaz was also wicked and he raided the temple’s coffers to bribe foreign leaders. Hezekiah is described as righteous, but even Hezekiah robbed the temple and stripped the gold off the doors of the temple to bribe foreign leaders in 2 Kings 18. While Hezekiah did repent of many wrongs and sought after God, the behavior had clearly become entrenched into even the righteous kings of Israel.

Consider for a moment one of the most famous teachings about money in the life of Jesus Christ. In Mark 12, Jesus is described as sitting in the temple and watching people give offerings to God. Jesus calls attention to a woman who gives very little, but who gives out of her scarcity. Jesus praised her for giving all that she has for God. The temple was not only funded by the rich but the poor as well.

What Jesus witnessed was probably not an isolated incident. Consider what these kings are doing during the time of Micah: widows and other poor folks are giving to God out of the little that they have and the money is being given to foreign leaders as bribes. Does that strike you as being either right or righteous? Do the kings seem like good rulers if they are taking the money given in worship by their citizens and giving it away as bribes?

Micah is passionate about something that context shows us was likely incredibly important and incredibly relevant to the world he lived in. I could stand here Sunday after Sunday and preach about how portions of the Bible indicate how evil it is to eat ham, but I assuming someone would rightly point out that there are more important things to preach on in our lives.

Micah is not passionate about something pointless. Even in the midst of a world where even the well-meaning rulers are caught up in a disturbing system, Micah stands and says “This is what is important: justice, kindness, and humility.” Micah is straightforward, passionate, and clear about what matters.

We do not have to go far to see that Micah's words are still relevant today. Micah preaches on the abuses of the wealthy and powerful, but Micah is clear that there are challenges across society. Micah calls out all who live by dishonesty and who defy God's call to live with integrity, honesty, and fairness.

I am not an economist, but consider for a moment how appropriate it is to talk about how a society treats money and power after a week where Wall Street has been so prominent in the news. I will not give my personal opinion, but there's something to be said about the fact that Micah's words were passionate and focused to the point that they are still relevant in conversation today. I would be remiss if I did not invite those of you who are interested in the world's news about Wall Street to spend more time with the Book of Micah.

So, outside of commentary on the world around us, what can we take away from this powerful prophet? The one thing that should be abundantly clear by this point in the sermon is that Micah believed that honesty and integrity mattered.

Living your life without integrity is a possibility in our world, but that does not mean we should seek to live without integrity. For Micah, there was a principle that was central to the faith and Micah stood with that principle even during a time when the rulers of the land were violating the principles and ways of life which God cherished.

We can take away two things from this truth about Micah. First, we can take away the fact that our integrity matters even while facing difficult days. We live in challenging days and there are many ways that we can take shortcuts in terms of our integrity. Perhaps we really dislike a politician so we share a rumor about his behavior that is not only unflattering but is untrue. If our integrity matters to us then the way we speak about the people we disagree with is as important as how we speak about the people we like. For Micah, honesty mattered and we should be honest.

In addition, if we do have a position of power, then we should use that power responsibly. I say this as someone who preaches for a living when we read a passage that critiqued the preachers of the prophet's day. If you have power, if you have wealth, if you have influence, then the call on you is as clear as it is on me. We have both the blessings of power, influence, and wealth in this life and the responsibility to use it with integrity. Blessing goes hand in hand with responsibility.

Stepping back towards the idea that there are at least two things we can learn from Micah, the second thing we can learn is that there is something powerful about deciding on a position in line with God's purposes and embracing it with your whole being. Such choices can be timeless and influence the world long after we have died.

Thousands of years later, we remember Micah because he stood for something during a difficult time. Despite the difficulty that always comes when a person challenges the rich, powerful, and ruthless, Micah embraced the calling to prophetically point the ways towards justice, kindness, and humility.

What are you called to point to as we go through these difficult days? Do you have a calling on your life to lift up the value of community during an isolating time? Do you have a calling to preach and share joy in a world that is occasionally depressing beyond belief? What are the things that God has placed at the center of your being and how do you share those things with the world around you?

Ultimately, we do not know the response the world had to Micah. If Micah is like many of the prophets, the response was probably poor to say the least. Clearly Micah did not change the way the world worked in that moment. Although Micah continues to inspire people today, the reality is that we simply don't know what happened to Micah.

What we do know is that Micah did not let his fear or concerns silence his voice. Micah was brave, courageous, and truthful despite the challenging circumstances in which he lived. What would the world look like if we were that brave, that courageous, or that steadfast? We are going to pray, but first we are going to take a moment in silence to think about that question: What would the world look like if we were that brave, that courageous, or that steadfast?