

Our second Scripture passage today is from the Old Testament as well, the book of Micah, Chapter 6, verses 6-8. I am reading from the Common English Bible. Listen now for the word of the Lord.

6 With what should I approach the Lord
and bow down before God on high?
Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings,
with year-old calves?
7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with many torrents of oil?
Should I give my oldest child for my crime;
the fruit of my body for the sin of my spirit?
8 He has told you, human one, what is good and
what the Lord requires from you:
to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.

This is the word of the Lord,
Thanks be to God.

Who hasn't been here? We just have a group of people- the Israelites- asking the eternal and overwhelming question: What do we have to do to please you? They are asking this of the Creator themselves. The perfect, triune being that we call God. And Israel? Israel has a bit of an *audacity* problem. As in, "You have the audacity to speak to *GOD* like *that?!?*" I imagine this as a moment of Israel talking to their mother... in a *tone*. Now you know the tone... that one that makes Mom snap you a look that tells you exactly how she will deal with your tone later.

Israel says, "With what should I approach the Lord?" OH! Should I completely burn some offerings? What if they are year-old calves? What about thousands of rams? How about I throw in some oil too? OH! I know. My oldest child. I'll give my oldest child to pay for my sins."

And that *look*, oh that *look*. God gives back through the words of Micah, "You have been told- *human one*- what is good. What is required of you but to do justice, to embrace faithful love, and to walk humbly with God?"

We all know this feeling; it's when your mom asks you to put away your clothes, and you really just don't want to, so by the time you actually do put them away, you have an attitude about it. You say, "well, obviously, I'll just sell them all, throw everything else away, and time it'll be done, my room will be clean...." Maybe that was just me.

But we know that that's not what she meant for you to do! We know that she means just clean up your room, and it'll be fine. That seems to be what God means in this passage. God says, "show me that you love me, that you're worshiping me." And Israel snaps back- Fine! I will burn sacrifices for you. One thousand of them! I will bring rivers and rivers of oil. All for you! I will go over and beyond anything that you're asking for."

Now, let's talk look- for a moment- at the context of this Micah passage. In our Summer Scripture chat on Wednesday, we talked a little bit about the context, and it seems like Micah is not being paid attention to as closely as God would like Micah to be.

Because as soon as the words are out of Micah's mouth, Israel is not following them. The rest of chapter 6 is a warning that punishment is coming, the people of Israel are eating, but not full, they are planting but not gathering anything. In general, the people of Israel are not great at listening to the prophets. Immediately before this passage in Micah, though, is a court case of sorts! God has called Israel out; God says, "Make your case to the mountains!" And then, God lists a whole bunch of stuff that God has done for Israel. God has listed all of these things that God has done for Israel, and all God asks in return is justice, love, and humility. It's difficult for humanity to even do these small things, and we give attitude back to God.

Now, I do want to tell you- this is supposed to be exaggerated. It's supposed to be a little sassy. It's actually my favorite thing to read when the Bible has a moment of sass. This passage- effectively- is Israel being intentionally problematic, and they are lashing out in their frustration. The first thing offered to God is "burnt offerings, with a calf of a year old." However, in Isaiah 1:11, God calls out the people and clearly states that They do not want these things:

"What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
says the Lord;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of goats" (Isaiah 1:11).

The suggestions of what to bring before God get more and more ridiculous as they go on. Starting with burnt offerings and ending with human sacrifice, the possibilities of presenting them to God are more and more sarcastic. The acts are meant to be more and more dramatic. The burnt offerings suggested would leave nothing left for the worshippers; it would all be dedicated to God.

The rams and oil are referenced in Leviticus 9:2-4, which says: "**2** Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a bull calf for your sin offering and a ram for your burnt offering, both without defect, and present them before the Lord. **3** Then say to the Israelites: 'Take a male goat for a sin offering, a calf, and a lamb—both a year old and without defect—for a burnt offering, **4** and an ox and a ram for a fellowship offering to sacrifice before the Lord, together with a grain offering mixed with olive oil. For today the Lord will appear to you.'" but Micah's listeners are sarcastic. They don't truly believe they will be giving these things for offerings to God. And finally, as a pinnacle of human delusion, the spokesman of humanity proposes to offer his son his firstborn. Saying: "Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

The use of the phrase "the fruit of my body, for the sin of my soul" is uncommon in the Hebrew Bible. This completes the last sassy suggestion of what to bring God when bowing before God. Instead of these giant things that would be impossible to present to God, God is simply asking us to be humble and to love God's people and do justice.

Micah's response that God says states so clearly: "human one, that's not what God means...." All God has asked of you is to walk humbly with God, to embrace love for God's people, and to do justice. Only three things. God doesn't need the sacrifices, God doesn't need the oils and the jewelry of our earthly possessions. God just needs the three things that God has requested. Love, justice, and humility. In Amos, chapter 5, verses 21 and 22- we find God saying this again through Amos, God says, "I hate, I reject your festivals;

I don't enjoy your joyous assemblies.
If you bring me your entirely burned offerings and gifts of food—
I won't be pleased;
I won't even look at your offerings of well-fed animals." God has no need for our festivals and our physical sacrifices. I am reminded of the Amos passage in this one because, in a way, it speaks to what God does want. God wants justice. God wants love. God wants humility.

Our Psalms passage today speaks to a similar concept of how God wants us to celebrate being God's people. We heard the Common English Bible earlier, but here is the Message version- I adapted it a little bit for inclusive language. Listen now, for the Word of the Lord:

"100 1-2 On your feet now—applaud God!

Bring a gift of laughter,
sing yourselves into God's presence.

3 Know this: God is God.

God made us; we didn't make God.

We're God's people, God's well-tended sheep.

4 Enter with the password: "Thank you!"

Make yourselves at home, talking praise.

Thank God. Worship God.

5 For God is sheer beauty,

all-generous in love,
loyal always and ever."

How beautiful is that concept that all we need to do to be welcomed into the kingdom of God into the heavenly realm is a simple thank you? It seems a lot like maybe that's the humility that God is asking of Micah and us to do justice for God's people, to love kindness, and to dream of that kindness for everyone, and to walk humbly with God.

In the last month, I have seen this most clearly when I was on the Mission Trip with the youth. We went up to Blue Ridge for a week, and it was stunning being up with these young people. We had seven youth, three adults, and when we all sat down together at the end of each night for devotion, we would talk about the highs and lows of our days. This was the best part of your day, and the not-so-great part of your day, and an additional thing. Often this is a moment where you see God during the day, but we reframed it for them. We asked, "Where did you see love today?"

Often, we have such different understandings of who God is. For some, God is a parent. For some God, is a rock. For some, God is this crazy mess of Trinity and Light and Goodness. We all kind of have a little bit of a different vision in our mind of what God is, however, each and every one of us knows what love is. We know that feeling. And, we know God is love. So, instead of "where did you see God today?" we asked "where did you see love today?" and y'all, we got so many incredible answers all week. For some, they saw love in a dog that was at the community food bank. For some, it was how everyone pitched in to cook dinner. For some, it was the morning chats on the porch. For others, it was the bus rides or watching people at our community service centers knowing that we were doing genuine good in their lives... I got to watch seven young people form together as one family and one team with loves at their center. They didn't seem to question it- too much- and yes, there were moments that it

got a little tense but in the end, we were one family serving God's people and we saw that love everywhere.

And that truly is what God is asking of us. Isn't it?

The question ends up being *how?* And I get it, it seems like a big ask in these three seemingly small things that God is asking.

To do justice-

We are called to fight for justice. To speak out when we see something harmful happening to others. To fight systems of oppression and pain. We are asked to make sure that humanity is taken care of, to be God's hands and feet in the world. Justice is easy to explain to children. We can easily explain that we need to be friends with everyone, and if you see someone being mean, you tell an adult and help the victim feel better. But this call gets harder the older we get. We see the lines so clearly that divide the sides of the aisle. We have personal feelings involved when the arguments get bigger. And yet, the call remains the same. We are called to fight for justice for all people. Not just the people who we agree with or who seem to know exactly what to say and exactly the right time to speak. We are called to use our words, and our influence regardless of the situation- to fight for God's people. Remember, everyone from every side of every argument is included in the group of "God's People".

To embrace faithful love-

Faithful love is an interesting phrase. It speaks to not just taking the easy route. This is similar to doing justice. We can't just love people who are the same as us. We must love those who look different, act different, believe different things. We must fully embody the love that Christ shows. Everyone is deserving of this love. Regardless of anything else. It's not easy, but that is the point. And it's okay! It can be difficult to get to the point of faithful love that is embraced fully and without question. This is the love I saw when our youth were working during the mission trip. They moved mulch, hung up clothing, counted cans, and sorted bags and bags of donations, and boxes and boxes of school supplies. They also talked to people who were visiting a community center to pick up food for the week. They showed love and acceptance as they played with children and occupied them while parents shopped.

Finally, we hear a call to walk humbly with God.

We are not asked to walk alongside God, we are not asked to wander around while God calls to us. We are called directly to walk humbly with God. This phrase doesn't actually mean to physically walk however, it means to "live in community with." So what God is actually asking us here is to humbly live in community with God. This community that God calls us to is one of love, justice, and humility. It's a community that allows us to be our true and authentic selves with God and with each other. Still a difficult call but a doable one. We can trust God to hold our authentic selves because God created us exactly as we are. In this call, God is truly just saying, "just walk with me, in community, the exact way I've created you."

Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church

08/15/21

We can complete these calls together in community with God. We know what we need to do, we know what God requires of us. Now, we just have to actually do it. Please pray with me,

Holy and Awesome God,

You've called us to justice, love, and a humble walk. Show us where to do your work in this world. Show us who needs love, who is facing injustice, and who we can bring into community with us. Thank you for leading and guiding us today and every day.

Amen.