

2024-08-25 Worship Notes

Welcome

Opportunities for Celebration and Service

- When you use a hand-held mic, it's important to keep it very close to your mouth. This prevents it from getting in the space of the speakers which causes the squeal.

Call to Worship is found at number 869 – two groups. Group 1 = south Group 2 = north

South – We are a covenant people, called to God by God, generation to generation.

*North – We are a covenant people, called to Jesus by Jesus,
losing our life to gain our life.*

***Together – We are a covenant people, called to church by the church,
weaving together the strong and the weak, the stranger and the friend.***

South – Renamed.

North – Reborn.

Together – Renewed. We gather ourselves in the community of believers.

We gather ourselves unto you.

Prayer

You are the God of covenant.

And you have never broken a covenant or gone back on your word.

We are amazed and grateful for your love, God.

Come to us as we have gathered ourselves to you. Amen.

Hymns

Children's Story

Morning Prayer

O God, we thank you for the opportunity to gather as your people, to fellowship together, to sing your praises and to worship you. Thank you for the ways we can see your work and know your presence with us – in the beauty of your created world, in the relationships we have, in the resiliency we see in the earth and in the ways our bodies and minds can heal from illness and wounds.

We're grateful for opportunities to learn, especially for our schools and teachers. We pray your blessing on students from the youngest who are learning to line up and tie their shoes to the older ones learning to be away from home and make independent decisions. We pray for teachers and staff as they guide and encourage and learn along with the students.

Loving God, in these moments, we bring to mind those we know and love who are ill and we ask for healing. (pause) We think of those who are grieving and we ask for comfort, especially the family of Irvin Goertzen. (pause) We pray for those who may be struggling with loneliness or anxiety. (pause)

God of peace, we pray for places in our community and our world where there is fear and violence. Be with those whose decisions impact the fate of others. Convict them with your Spirit of compassion and mercy. Be with those who are working to bring your love and peace.

Thank you, God, for the celebrations that are happening in the Moundridge community this weekend at Eden Church as they remember your faithfulness in their lives and history.

We thank you God for our church and our community, for the ways that your Spirit is moving and encouraging and leading us here, in this place and in this time. Thank you for your faithfulness across the generations and right now. Bless this time of worship; may it bring inspiration to us and glory to you. Amen.

Message “Just Do It” - Micah 6 and Romans 15

Well... I don't know how much you all've been paying attention to the political conventions recently? The Democrats just wrapped theirs up last week and the Republicans' was last month. Even if you didn't actually watch or listen to them in real time, it's been kinda hard to avoid hearing the commentators and pundits and fact-checkers and the analysts and the critics. So I imagine pretty much everyone has at least heard clips from some of the speeches or heard *about* the speeches. And I think everyone knows that the point of these conventions and speeches is for the speech-makers to try to explain their positions or their plans on what they think are the most important topics and then to get people fired up about those positions or plans. And I thought, huh! I wonder how a Mennonite pastor might preach a sermon about what they think is the most important message of the Bible and how they might get their congregation fired up about that message. And then I thought... I wonder how a Mennonite pastor would know when people are fired up...?

If a person wanted to sum up the message of the entire Bible in one verse, they could use Micah 6:8 with confidence. It's brief and to-the-point, effective and efficient, it's no-nonsense. I appreciate that about the prophet Micah. One could read this verse and easily think, “This is not complicated, people! Come on! Let's JUST DO IT!” But I also realize (and appreciate) the complexity and challenges in the actual doing of this mandate. Like a lot of Biblical wisdom, the words themselves can seem straightforward, almost simple but, of course, to actually incorporate the meaning of the words into our consciousness, to make the words have life, to walk the talk... that's anything but simple. And we know from experience that the just like the NIKE mantra, to “JUST DO IT” takes years of work, discipline, trying, failing and trying again. It's hard.

Let's back up just a bit and look at where the prophet was coming from. In the first 5 chapters of Micah we read that the people were not holding up their end of the covenant agreement; the wealthy and powerful ones were not, in fact, caring for those who needed their help. Just the opposite, they were haughty and deceitful. They were mistreating the women and children as well as strangers who were just passing through. There were terrible injustices being done by the Hebrew rulers to the Hebrew peasants and the prophet was calling them out, taking them to task, speaking for God to let them know that God was not pleased. In fact, God was angry and grieving, realizing that the consequences of the people's behavior were about to catch up to them and God would need to start all over again with “the remnant of Jacob” after the Assyrian empire had done their damage. So now, in Chapter 6, the first five verses God was challenging the people to seriously reconsider their commitment to being “the chosen, faithful people of Yahweh”, because they had NOT been faithful. So God was reminding them that He had been faithful... and wondering what happened to them?

Then our reading begins at verse 6 when the people realize their guilt and ask, contritely what they could do to make up for their bad behavior? The prophet responds with the power-packed one-sentence summary. God does not want or need the ritual sacrifices of calves or rams or olive oil and certainly not first born children! God wants people who are passionate about how they live. God wants people who are transformed (or, as we all are, in the process of being transformed) by the power of God's love. God wants people who do things like go work with MDS for a week or a month or a year. God wants people who respond to the needs of their community and volunteer at the homeless shelter or the food bank or respond to the call for items for MCC school kits. God is looking for people who are looking for God – those who are willing to quiet their minds and their spirits in order to open themselves to what God's Spirit might have to share with them. God is longing for people to use whatever strengths and gifts God has created them with for the betterment of the community and the world.

Here's how Eugene Peterson writes Micah 6:8 in *The Message*:

(God) has already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don't take yourself too seriously – take God seriously.

The passage from Romans brings this message on into the New Testament, the early church, and right up into the 21st century. The Apostle Paul was writing to the Jesus-followers in Rome whom he had never met. "Church" at that time in Rome consisted of small groups of people who met together in their homes as they tried to encourage one another to stay faithful.

True to form, Paul's healthy ego is on full display right off the bat in verse one of Chapter 15 as he includes himself among those whose faith is strong and able. But then he's quick to say that strength is for service, not status. Strength is for service... NOT status. Those who are strong, he says, are not to do what's most convenient for them, which is usually to dominate and overpower the weak. Instead, Paul says, the strong are to carry the weak and lift them up, out of the ongoing consequences of their weakness. Don't further weaken them by shaming or calling them names. But look out for them. Look for ways to help. And why should the strong respond this way? Because that's what Jesus did. Jesus is the ultimate example of the strong one who made himself completely vulnerable and available to others.

And then, I really appreciate the way Eugene Peterson's interpretation ties this passage right back to the Hebrew scriptures – not specifically to Micah, but generally, to the broad message of Scripture, as Paul would have been making that connection for the Romans. There were at least 3 issues that Paul was addressing with the Romans that I think we still struggle with.

First, there was a Jewish problem and there was a Gentile problem. The Jewish problem was that they were exclusive, thinking that they and they alone had all the answers because they had all the traditions. They had "the law". The Gentile problem was that they boasted that they didn't need the Jews, that God had actually rejected the Jews in favor of their own new-found inclusion. The Jews, the ones with the traditions, the long-standing ways of doing things and of seeing things, and the Gentiles those who are more new to the faith journey, who see things through fresh, and sometimes idealistic, eyes... they needed each other then and we, who come from different backgrounds and are at different points on our faith journeys, need each other now.

Anyone who wants to follow Jesus and who honors the covenant between God and people, is welcome.

The next issue that Paul was referring to was what we call salvation. In Judaism there's no such thing as salvation by works. Salvation in Judaism is understood to happen by God's election, by God's grace alone. When one obeys God's laws, that's a way to maintain the covenant, which includes salvation, but it's never a way to earn it. That can't be done. There are still very different understandings of what's required for salvation and those different understandings are still divisive and exclusionary.

And finally, Paul wrote his letter to the Romans as a politically subversive act. The "good news" of the Roman Empire was that Caesar was an oppressive, iron-fisted, all-powerful global peace-keeper. He was literally called "Lord" because his military might maintained an uneasy sense of "peace" and "security". Paul and the Jesus-followers proclaimed the gospel that Jesus and his message of sacrificial love brings true liberation with justice and righteousness. Jesus is Lord. We still struggle with the issue of militarism and allegiance.

Peterson writes, "Even if it was written in Scripture long ago, you can be sure it's written for *us*. God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm, personal counsel in Scripture to come to characterize *us*, keeping us alert for whatever he will do next. May our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all."

I'm deeply drawn to the way Peterson interprets this passage because it accompanies the Micah 6 passage so beautifully. Micah instructs us about what to do – DO justice, love mercy and walk humbly. Here we find instructions about how to BE. "If we can be "dependably steady and warmly personal" in ways that God is like that, then God can develop in us the maturity needed to get along. Can you imagine what kind of world we might live in if all the Jesus-followers took on God's character traits the way it's being described here?"

So, to conclude my Mennonite pastor's convention sermon about what I think may be the most important message of the Bible – from the Old Testament prophet Micah to the gospel of Jesus through the eyes of the Apostle Paul...

Treat people fairly and justly. Be kind and loving. Take God so seriously that you absorb and reflect God's character. And when we begin to do this, as Peterson writes, "We'll be a choir – not our voices only, but our very lives singing in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Master Jesus." JUST DO IT! And BE IT! Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Bless these gifts, O God, and all who have given them. May the gifts and the givers be used to share your love. Amen.

Benediction

May the love of God be above you to overshadow you,
beneath you to uphold you, before you to guide you,

behind you to protect you,
close beside you and within you
to make you able for all things,
and to reward both your faith and your faithfulness
with a joy and a peace that the world cannot give,
neither can it take away.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.