

Bring Our Action  
Micah 6:6-8  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
October 21, 2018  
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Today we begin three weeks of exploring together the question, “What Shall We Bring?” as we prepare to make our stewardship commitments for 2019.

The reality is that the church is able to do what it does because each of us makes a commitment to it.

And this is on several levels.

While we have staff, our staff doesn't make the church. Those of us who work here don't do all the work. While we lead and guide, while we help set the vision, while we bring certain expertise in our areas, the church is not about the few of us who have offices and titles, but rather is about all of us who are part of this community bringing our gifts and our skills to work together for the good of both this community and also the world.

And the church is also what it is because of the financial support that all of us give. A church is not a business with a product or service to sell that creates an income stream. While we are connected to a denomination, we are in covenantal relationship, a part of each other because we keep choosing to be. But we aren't owned by the larger church nor are we funded by the larger church. Instead, everything that happens here from the mundane realities like paying electric bills and contracting for snow removal to the more engaging things like supporting mission projects, sending youth to camp and engaging in important conversations through faith formation opportunities – all of these are possible because we are a people who believe that the world needs a church like ours. And more than just that belief, these are possible because we believe it not only with our words but also with our resources. So, when you and I put money in

the offering plate – that is the fuel that, along with our gifts and energy and passion, makes the ministries that happen at and through First Christian Church possible.

So, with that in mind we will explore this question of “what shall we bring?” and we do that today with the passage the questions grows out of – a favorite passage of many – Micah 6:6-8.

Since this is the text we are looking at today, it makes sense to take a few minutes to ask what is going on in its original context. While scholars tend to understand that the book of Micah, in the form we have it, came from multiple authors over a number of years,<sup>1</sup> it is centered on the words and activity of the prophet Micah around the eighth century BCE. While other prophets, like Isaiah who is a contemporary of Micah, had royal connections, Micah was “a farmer prophet without political connections or influence.”<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the book of Micah, like most of our prophetic writings, “is heavily loaded with political themes.”<sup>3</sup> After all, Micah’s hometown would have been in an area attacked during the invasion of Judah in 701 BCE<sup>4</sup> and “this makes Micah a war refugee who had to flee”<sup>5</sup> as the area was invaded. Micah knew what it was to hurt and suffer and to be angry. He knew what it was to not only talk about personal relationships with God but also to ask questions about systems and about God’s involvement in and God’s call to the people to get involved in the systems of their world. So, when we read this passage, we must remember that context.

We also must remember that these verses are part of a larger scene. The language used here in chapter 6 sounds like a court case. And into this conversation come the questions we

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<sup>1</sup> Daphne Gascot Aries, *Considering the Text, “What Shall We Bring?”* stewardship material from Center for Faith and Giving, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Gascot Aries, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Gascot Aries, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Gascot Aries, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Gascot Aries, 3.

hear in verses 6 and 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? 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?*<sup>6</sup>

With what shall I come? We know that question, don't we? Sometimes we ask it curiously...what do I need to bring? What should I bring? Sometimes we ask it hesitantly...am I bringing enough? Am I bringing the right thing? And sometimes we ask it with a frustrated tone in our voice...how much is being asked of me? Do I have to do or bring something else? Why me?

With what shall I come? Shall I bring a little bit? A decent offering? Is a sacrificial offering required of me? Should I bring everything I have?

And then we hear the answer. In Micah 6:8 we hear these words: *He has told you, O mortal, 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?*<sup>7</sup>

And while we've come to love these words, the reality is that if we really listen they are terribly challenging. They are challenging first because the answer isn't, "No, you don't need to bring sacrificial offerings." Verse 8 doesn't replace the call to participate in the community and to offer our resources to support it. Verse 8 doesn't say, "Don't worry about coming to church...don't worry about putting something in the offering plate." What verse 8 says is that showing up at the appointed time and giving even extravagant offerings doesn't let you off the hook from living in relationship with God and embracing all that means.

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<sup>6</sup> Micah 6:6-7, NRSV.

<sup>7</sup> Micah 6:8, NRSV.

Because that's what those beautiful words that we love are about. They are about how we will live, what we will be like when we are truly living in relationship with God.

And this answer that says that we are to do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with God. This is not a passive position, but this is about actively being engaged in life and in the world around us. It is about actively being engaged on behalf of God, as those who represent God.

Act justly. "To act justly means to consider our role in the world around us. To do justice means to restore equity and fairness. For this to happen we must consider our interdependence with people and the rest of creation around us. [For example] a lot of people have to do their jobs so that you and I can stop by the store on our way home from work and pick up a dozen eggs. There have to be hens, and food to feed them, a field for them to live, and (most likely) fossil fuel to bring the eggs to us."<sup>8</sup> If we are doing justice we become people who strive to think through the implications of even our seemingly smallest decisions and then who work to create a world where equity is a greater reality.

This is especially important because most of us are people who are part of the dominant narrative of our culture. Most of us are people who have benefitted from passivity when it comes to fighting for justice for the poor, the oppressed, the excluded, and even the earth. And yet the prophet Micah calls us to actively do justice, to choose to work on behalf of those who don't have the power to speak out or to change the systems that hold them down.

Love kindness, or as some translations word it, love mercy. And it's really mercy we are called to love because while "kindness means being considerate of something or someone else, ... mercy is showing kindness when one has the opportunity and maybe even the right not to

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<sup>8</sup> Gascot Aries, 5.

do so.”<sup>9</sup> So, loving kindness or mercy is about choosing to consider the implications of our lives on others, choosing empathy even when it isn’t comfortable and when it isn’t required of us. And remember, the word here is love which means we don’t do it grudgingly but that we live in a position of generosity so much so that we opt for empathy and compassion even when we could walk the other way. After all, when we love something it becomes a part of us.

Walk humbly with God. Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God. Walk humbly because even those of us who are striving to live in God’s ways can get a little uppity about it. Even we good Christian people can sometimes start patting ourselves on the back and judging others who we deem as less than ourselves. And yet, Micah’s vision, along with that of the entire Biblical narrative is that our faith is not a one-on-one proposition. It isn’t about my personal salvation or a me-and-Jesus relationship. Rather, deep faith knows that we are interconnected and when we know that then humility is more likely to be part of our reality. After all, when your pain is my pain and mine yours...when your joy is mine to celebrate and you are celebrating with me in mine...then we no longer find ourselves competing for credit or working only for our own wants. Rather we find ourselves living lives committed to others just because we all matter and not for the credit we might receive.

While many of us have come to love the verses we read today...while many of us have them on wall hangings, t-shirts, or refrigerator magnets...the reality is that while they are lovely, they are not easy. This is hard work. It is deliberate work. It isn’t just about what feels good, but it is about real commitment.

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<sup>9</sup> Gascot Aries, 5.

And this is the place from which good stewardship grows. After all, while God *does* want our wealth – and we'll talk more about that next week – God doesn't *just* want our wealth. Rather God wants our whole selves and wants us to be grounded in divine values.

And so, we are called – to bring our action – to work in active and real ways on behalf of those who don't have the power or position to speak out. Remember, Micah and his contemporaries were addressing the systems around them and calling to task the leaders who continued to take advantage of people and of the world.

We are called to work in active and real ways even when it means giving up something ourselves.

We are called to pay attention to the people and world around us, to understand our connectedness, and to realize that when one suffers so do the rest of us. And we are called to an active faith that is about more than just us alone, that is about more than just a personal reassurance of God's love. Because we are called to act on behalf of God in this world...to live in ways that level the playing ground for all people...to live in ways that affirm the worth of creation, not as something to be used for our benefit, but as something that has worth apart from us. We are called to live in ways that show in each moment the life-giving love of God.

With what shall we come before God? We shall come with lives that reflect God's love. We shall come with a willingness to act on behalf of the other. We shall come with a humility that chooses God's way even when it challenges us. We shall come with our whole selves, living our lives as an offering to God.

Amen.