

Discovering Love Again
Micah 5:2-5a
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
December 19, 2021
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I suspect most of us - those of us who have been surrounded by the Christian story - hear this reading from Micah and pretty immediately think of Jesus. After all, we know that Bethlehem is where he was born. And one of Christianity's favorite images for Jesus is that of the good shepherd, so we recognize him when Micah talks about this ruler feeding his flock. Additionally, we call Jesus the Prince of Peace, so when Micah says, "He shall be the one of peace," we see Jesus.

It is also important to remember that these words from Micah originally came in a context some seven hundred years before Jesus. And while we keep hearing a new word for our day in much of what the prophets say, we cannot forget that they spoke in a certain context and what they said mattered to the people of that time.

So, who was Micah? Micah was an 8th century prophet - now remember, this is 8th century bce, so before Jesus. He began as an ordinary guy from the Judean hillside south of Jerusalem. As a prophet, he was one who spoke on behalf of God, which required listening and honesty and risk.

And there was a lot that needed to be addressed honestly. After all, in Micah's time the Hebrew people were divided into two kingdoms. Over the years they vacillated between being allies and being enemies. Meanwhile, neither was a great power. Rather the power of the day was Assyria, the country that ended up taking out the northern kingdom and subduing the southern. So, the people were living in fear and conflict.

But that's not all. If you read the whole book of Micah - and it's not a long book, so it's very readable - you will discover that Micah's greatest concern was the deep injustice that was part of their reality. Micah spoke an honest word to the powers that be - the political powers, the religious powers, the rich folk. Micah spent plenty of energy addressing the injustices of his day - the fact that the rich kept getting richer and the poor poorer...the fact those in power did little but look out for themselves.

Now by this point in the book of Micah, we can assume that things aren't looking so good for the people, even the powerful people, because his tone has shifted to be one of promise. So in these last chapters of Micah we hear familiar words like those in chapter 4 where he says, "...they shall beat their swords in plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation..." (Micah 4:3, NRSV). Or in chapter 6 we hear those favorite 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?" (Micah 6:8, NRSV).

So our reading today, positioned between these other two passages, was not originally heard as a prediction of Jesus' birth, but a reminder that God's intention is for peace and justice, for equity and compassion, for wholeness and healing.

The early Christians saw Jesus in this and other passages because these were the things that they witnessed in his life. And so, looking backward through the lens of knowing Jesus, they connected to the prophets. And, it is important that we remember this. Because we don't read Micah during Advent only to affirm that our Jesus who was born in Bethlehem, who was a descendent of David, is the leader, the savior, upon whom they were waiting. But we read Micah and the other prophets during Advent to remind ourselves who God is and what Jesus came to this world for...for peace (and we named it last week...peace doesn't come easy)...for justice, for equity, for wholeness, for a changing of the systems as well as a changing of our hearts.

Similarly, the gospel writer Luke tells us that when pregnant Mary prayed to God, her prayer wasn't one of simple gratitude and joy...it wasn't one simply acknowledging the honor she felt to parent this child...but it was a prayer about the justice and equity that she understood was the will of God *and* the intention for her child. Do you remember her words according to Luke? She said, "[God] has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:52-53, NRSV).

And this is who Jesus was. Living from the heart of God meant that Jesus lived in ways that honored the dishonorable, that included the excluded, that chose gentleness over violence. Because of God's love, as Brian McLaren says, "Jesus was tender with children, showed uncommon - even scandalous - respect for women, called people to love their enemies not slaughter them, and walked a path truth-telling, kindness, equality and peace" (A Post-Patriarchal Christmas, [A Post-Patriarchal Christmas \(Brian McLaren\) | FaithLead: Convergence Online](#)).

What does all of this mean?

It means that if we are to follow Jesus, these need to be the things people witness in our lives.

It means that if we are to love as God loves, then we need to understand that love is an action not feeling; that love involves risk and looks out first for the other, especially the one who is othered and oppressed. In fact, it even means that we would be well served to realize that love - if we are loving in God's way - can be dangerous.

Rev. Cameron Trimble, in a devotion (12/8/2021) written for "Piloting Faith," writes this: *It's a shift for some of us to think that Love unleashed in the world is dangerous.*

But Love is dangerous if your sense of power comes from dominating and oppressing others. [Because] Love insists on equality, respect, and kindness.

Love is dangerous if you use your privilege to get ahead in life at the expense of others. [Because] Love says we are all equally valued, valuable, and deserving.

Love is dangerous if you hoard resources for yourself while others are denied. [Because] Love calls us to be generous with each other and care for the common good.

Love unleashed in the world means that the oppressive power systems that seem to be winning have no chance. The call of the long arc of history is always the same: it's the call of God's people who rise up, again and again, preaching Love and longing to be free.

Rev. Trimble goes on saying: There are many days, especially when I watch the news, when the Way of Love seems like a distant, naïve dream. But then I remember the Advent message: God breaks through. God is with us and within us. Love is on the loose.

Friends, Advent reminds us again and again that God has not forgotten us, that Love is on the loose, and that we are invited to be of this amazing thing God is doing. Let us discover again this wonderful, dangerous, amazing Love of our God. And let us share it abundantly with the world. Amen.