

LAKESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO?
Micah 6:1-8

In Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegone the little town proudly proclaims that it's the place, "where the women are strong, the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average."

Admit it. You *too* have the Lake Wobegone Syndrome. The truth is this Lake Wobegone Syndrome probably describes how *most* of us feel about ourselves. "*The Average American thinks he isn't*" is how the saying goes. And it's *true*.

- The majority of men think they're *handsome*.
- The majority of women think they're *beautiful*.
- Sixty percent of students think they're in the *top 10%*.

We all tend to get *through the day*, we all get *through life*, by believing that *somehow* we're significantly *different, better, more worthy*, than those that surround us. We find *comfort* in *overestimating ourselves*. *Self-deception keeps the world going round*.



Can you recall the last time you were out on the road and some *other* driver *crowded* too close, *pulled out* too soon, *parked* too crooked, or *drove* too slow or fast to suit you? Isn't our first response to mutter something about what a crummy driver that other person is? In other words, we instantly elevate *our own driving skills* to some *higher*, less *flawed* plateau.

Or take some other examples:

- if the *house* is a mess, it's the kid's fault;
- if our *taxes* aren't done, it's the government's fault;
- if our *weight* is too great it's McDonald's fault.

Time to sue.

Except for maybe a few *depressed moments* we can generally convince ourselves that we *stand alone* and *above* the foibles of others. We know we're not *perfect*. But we can sure spot those who are obviously *less perfect than us*. This is the way we find *reassurance ... self-confidence ... self-worth ...* by comparing ourselves to others and finding them *LACKING*.



In today's Old Testament lesson, the prophet Micah was charged with confronting a equally *smug, self-satisfied* Israel. *NOT ONLY* did God's covenant community *not see* how far it had fallen into the ways of *sin* and *selfishness ... Israel even felt righteously indignant at God's perceived SLOW-TO-SAVE-US attitude*.

- Foreign kings, the powers of Assyria and Egypt, old enemies in Samaria and Edom; all were *constantly threatening* the continued existence of Israel.
- Despite repeated *warnings* from God's prophets and the outright *defiant behavior* of Israel's kings and priests, Israel's attitude continued to be one of

“poor me.” “Why isn’t God doing something about all of this? Don’t we deserve better? After all, aren’t we God’s CHOSEN ones!”



MICAH IS GOD’S MOUTHPIECE.

Micah first reminds Israel of the *miraculous history* she has experienced through the mighty acts of God ... The Exodus out of slavery in Egypt; a string of exceptional leaders to guide the way: Moses, Aaron, Miriam; and finally, safe passage into the Promised Land itself.

Still, Israel just doesn’t seem to get it.

In one of the greatest smirks and snickers in the Bible, Israel responds: “So, what do you want God? Thousands of rams! Ten thousand rivers of oil! Maybe you want the death of all the firstborn ... the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? Would THAT satisfy you God?”

To such snide, outlandish, even blasphemous words, God’s response is restrained simplicity. In God’s infinite patience, the message the prophet delivers is that just three things are required of the people of Israel to reestablish the rightness of the covenant relationship between THEM and THEIR GOD.

Just do three things, Israel: MISHPAT, HESED, and HASNEA.

Will you say these words after me? We’re going to learn a little Hebrew this morning:

MISHPAT: “Do justice.” HESED: “love kindness.” HASNEA: “walk humbly with your God.”

SO GOD SAYS ... “That’s all I’m asking. I’m not asking much, Israel. Just three things! Only make every facet of your lives, every institution in your communities, every encounter you have with others, be defined by MISHPAT, HESED, and HASNEA.

And what God said to ISRAEL, God is saying to the CHURCH TODAY ... to YOU and to ME!



1. First, let’s talk about MISHPAT. Say it for me again: MISHPAT.

God’s first requirement is for us to “do justice.” Justice is such an easy word to say, but it is a difficult word to live because there is so much injustice in our world.

- We live in a world where there is violence and the innocent suffer.
- We live in a world where there is hatred and people are hurt.
- We live in a world where there is hunger and people are starving.
- We live in a world where there is prejudice and misunderstanding, and people are denied their basic human freedoms.

★ *Doing justice* in our everyday lives concerns the passion that you and I must have to see that EVERY PERSON has a decent opportunity to live their lives without fear, and prejudice, and hatred ... with the opportunity to live life to its fullest.



One of the essential tenets/beliefs of the Reformed Faith as defined in our Book of Confessions is to “seek justice and live in obedience to the Word of God.” Jack Rogers, one of my seminary professors, Moderator of the 213th General Assembly, a mentor and friend, wrote the book “A Guide to the Book of Confessions.” In the book, Jack says, regarding justice, that ...

“We believe as Presbyterian Reformed Christians that we have a job to try and transform the world, to transform society, to make it more the way God would like it to be.”

Micah phrased it so eloquently when he said: “and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice” ... MISHPAT.



2. The second requirement is HESED. Say it for me again: HESED.

God expects you to “love kindness” ... to show kindness to others. This is the most basic requirement that God expects of us ... that we treat other people as we would like to be treated.

On the surface, this may sound like a very easy and simple way to live. But in reality, it is a very costly lifestyle, because kindness in the Bible has backbone – it has guts – it is more than simply being tolerant of others. One person said, “Kindness isn’t really kindness until it costs you something.”

It is worth noting here, that of these three requirements, the first two deal with our relationship to people and the third deals with our relationship to God. This is because it is rather futile to talk about God unless we come to respect the men and women that God created in his image. In 1 John 4:20, the writer says *we are not likely to love God whom we have not seen unless we first to love our fellow humans whom we can see.*

Okay ... I don’t know if there’s a price tag attached to kindness, but I believe that when we go out of our way in being kind to another, we usually bring out the best that is in them.



A fourth grade school teacher by the name of Miss Thompson found it difficult to like one of her students. His name was Teddy Stallard and he was not interested in school, school work, or anything connected to school. His attitude was so disagreeable that Miss Thompson almost found herself *enjoying* the Fs she wrote on his papers.

Miss Thompson knew Teddy’s background. His school records indicated that in the *first grade* he had shown some promise. In the *second grade*, his mother fell seriously ill and died that year. In the *third grade* Teddy was tabbed a slow learner. And now in the *fourth grade* he was far behind and Miss Thompson noted that his father had no interest in Teddy’s progress.

Christmas time came and the boys and girls in Miss Thompson’s room brought her some gifts. To her surprise, there was a very crudely wrapped present from Teddy. Opening the package, she discovered a gaudy rhinestone bracelet and a bottle of cheap perfume. Sensing that the other children were beginning to *smirk* and *giggle* at the gift, Miss Thompson put the bracelet on and opened the perfume. She put some perfume on her wrist and invited the children to smell by saying, “Doesn’t the perfume smell lovely?” “Isn’t the bracelet beautiful?”

Taking their cue from Miss Thompson’s kindness, the children responded with “oohs” and “aahs.” At the end of the school day, little Teddy went to Miss Thompson’s desk and said: “Miss Thompson ... Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother used to ... and her bracelet looks real pretty on you, too. I’m glad you like my presents.”

From that day forward, Miss Thompson began to show more kindness toward that little boy. And that little boy began to improve – both in grades and attitude.

Many years later, Miss Thompson received a letter from Teddy telling her that he was graduating from High School ... second in his class. Four years later, she

received another letter from Teddy telling her that he was graduating from College ... first in his class. And four more years later, there was another letter to inform her that this young fellow who had given her a gaudy bracelet and a bottle of cheap perfume was now *Theodore Stallard, M.D.* Also, he was getting married and his father was now dead, too. Would Miss Thompson be willing to sit where his mother would sit for the wedding if she were alive? “*You’re all the family I have left now,*” wrote Teddy.

Miss Thompson sat proudly where Teddy’s mother would have sat for that wedding. That moment of kindness many years before had brought out the best in that young boy.

Kindness may cost you something in time ... money ... in pride. But, kindness is what God expects you to show to other people.

As Micah phrased it so poignantly: “and what does the Lord require of you but ... to love kindness” ... HESED.



3. The final requirement, as I noted before, deals with our relationship with God ... HASNEA. Say it for me again: HASNEA.

God expects you to walk humbly with him. Eugene Peterson, in his translation of the Bible, has translated “*to walk humbly with your God*” as “*don’t take yourself too seriously, but live in quiet fellowship with your God.*” Living in quiet fellowship with God is simply living one’s life and doing the things God would be doing.



So often, people think that “*walking humbly*” with God means doing a lot of things that appear to be religious, like preaching or becoming a missionary or teaching a Sunday school class. There’s nothing wrong with any of these activities. However ...

- ➔ “*Walking humbly with God*” simply means not taking ourselves too seriously, and living our lives so others can see something of God in us.
- ➔ “*Walking humbly with God*” simply means not taking ourselves too seriously, and living in quiet fellowship with God.
- ➔ “*Walking humbly with God*” simply means not taking ourselves too seriously, and seizing those opportunities to do the things that God would be doing ... to be the living presence of God in our daily lives.

So, what does God expect of you? Micah put it so simply and yet so eloquently when he said: “... and what does the Lord require of you ... but to walk humbly with your God?” ... HASNEA.



Looking at it as we have, it becomes clear just how far ISRAEL, and how far WE, have fallen from the will of God. It becomes clear how miserably the human side of the covenant equation has behaved. It becomes clear how much easier it would be to produce those thousands of rams, or ten thousand rivers of oil, than it is to transform our lives into genuine expressions of ... what are those three words ... MISHPAT, HESED, and HASNEA.

Micah’s three words in today’s text are God’s expectations for all who claim to walk in a covenant relationship with the Divine. God doesn’t declare that *mishpat*, *hesed*, and *hasnea* are characteristics found in the general world. *NO. Mishpat, hesed and hasnea are the qualities God expects of God’s own people.* God has a higher standard for us. Just as Micah spoke to the covenant community of Israel then, Micah speaks just as directly to the covenant community called the church today.

We, the church, claim to live in a covenant relationship with God through the gift of Jesus the Christ. Through Jesus, the only one who could wholly fulfill the qualities of *mishpat*, *hesed*, and *hasnea* in a human life ... the door to a right relationship with God has once again been opened to us. But to stay in that covenant relationship ... the requirements remain the same.

- ➔ We are still called by God to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.
- ➔ We are still called by God to live these three words with our whole beings ... remind me of these three words again: *MISHPAT*, *HESED*, and *HASNEA*.

How tragic, then, that Christ's own body, the *Covenant Community of the Church*, is often as obsessed as the rest of our culture with the earmarks of success and the trappings of wealth, rather than with *HOLINESS* and *WISDOM* ... *JUSTICE* and *LOVE* ... *HUMILITY* and *GRACE*.

★ **A church that is consumed with buildings and budgets is a church that has lost touch with its reason for existence.**

Just as you think you're better than you are, the church thinks it's better than it is. It's as easy for the church to be mesmerized by materialism as the rest of our culture. The *bigger* the building, the *grander* the programming, the *greater* the exposure, the *larger* the numbers attending: *are all just materialistic expressions of the covenant community, not the spiritual heart of the community.*

To take up the cross daily is to see everyone as Jesus sees them: FROM THE CROSS.

- ➔ **Can we look out on the world FROM THE CROSS?**
- ➔ **And can we look on others as Jesus looks on us ... FROM THE CROSS?**



What God wants from us, and what God will judge us by, isn't how big did we get, or how well did we worship, or how excellent were our programs.

What does the Lord require of us, His church?

YOU tell me.

What are those three words?

***MISHPAT*, *HESED*, and *HASNEA*.**

Amen and Amen.