

**Epiphany 4 A**  
**Grace Lutheran Church**  
**Lakeland, FL**  
**January 29, 2023**

**Micah 6:1-8**  
**Psalm 15**  
**I Cor 1:18-31**  
**Mt 4:23 –5:11**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Would you please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Friday night after I'd had supper and cleaned up the kitchen, it was nearly 7:00. I sat in my living room with the TV remote in my hand. Shall I watch or not? I'd heard the reports of the horrific way that Tyre Nichols was killed. Did I need to watch it in order to believe the truth of it. Maybe you went through a similar debate.

I would like to remind you that I do not hand select the scripture readings that we have on any given Sunday. Rather, we follow a three-year schedule of readings that is used by many if not most of the mainline denominations around the world. So the fact that today's readings are curiously apt for the events of the week here in the United States is one more of God's interesting synchronicities. And today two of our three lessons seem to speak to us even more urgently.

The first text for our meditation today is this verse from the prophet Micah: *...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.* In Micah's time, things weren't going well for the people of God in the Southern Kingdom. The rule of kings had mixed results. Too many of them are described by the prophets as one "who did evil in the sight of the Lord." The prophets served as correctors for the kings who were in error, admittedly with varying degrees of success. All around the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms other nations and empires were growing in power and might. Assyria was a threat to the Northern Kingdom which fell to the Assyrians in 721 BC. And Babylon similarly threatened the Southern Kingdom but not until years later.

The people of God had forgotten God's saving action in their lives over the centuries. They had forgotten the rescue from Egypt, the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. They had forgotten the covenant relationship with God that was memorialized in the giving of the Torah, the Ten Commandments. They had forgotten how God led them through the wilderness into the land of promise.

In their neglect of the covenant relationship with God, their priorities shifted. Society developed around clear delineations of the haves and the have-nots, those who counted and those who did not. The "haves" had a life of comfort and ease – at the expense of the others. And the rich and powerful continued going through the motions of worship and sacrifice, though these were empty rituals devoid of faith. Going through the motions for show. For the "have-nots," life was difficult. The poor were oppressed and taken advantage of by the institutions of society. Their leaders hated the good and embraced the evil. False prophets engaged in false teaching.

Micah spoke to them both and said *"Hear this you rulers and chiefs – you abhor justice and pervert equity. Your judges issue rulings based upon bribery, priests are in it only for the money, and false prophets preach whatever people want to hear. You are headed for ruin."*

And ruin indeed was on the way. And Micah, the prophet, was called to preach to the people, What does God want from us? And the simple message was this: do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.

Do justice. We all have seen the statues of Lady Justice in courtrooms. She is clad in a toga, holding a set of scales in her hand, with her eyes covered by a blindfold. Justitia was a Roman god added to the pantheon of gods by Augustus, who was emperor when Jesus was born. Now we have always been taught that the blindfold was a good thing; it implied that justice was not to be swayed by the influences of privilege, power and influence. But the images of her at that time didn't have a blindfold.

The first known image to show a blindfolded Lady Justice comes from art in a collection of satirical poems by fifteenth century lawyer Sebastian Brant. In 1494 he portrayed Jutitia with a blindfold as a *critique* of justice at the time. His Lady Justice was blindfolded so that that she could not see the injustice all around her. The blindfold was applied to suggest that lawyers played fast and loose with the truth. That is what was happening in Micah's time.

Do justice. What does this mean?

All of us want justice for those who are wronged, for those who have been harmed. But sometimes we are like Lady Justice with a blindfold on such that we cannot see the need and the oppression and the suffering around us. We hold a tiny whiff of an air of self-righteousness, if we're honest – thank you God that I am not like *those* poor schmucks. Or we utter the pious phrase, "There but for the grace of God go I," implying that God's grace was extended to us and not to them.

And we tighten the knot on our blindfolds.

So what does it mean to "Do Justice?" How do we do what God requires of us?

This is where our Gospel lesson come in. For it is Jesus who takes the blindfold off and tells us what justice really looks like in the Beatitudes. For Jesus, justice is:

- Life in the kingdom of heaven for the poor in spirit
- Comfort for those who mourn
- A place for the meek
- Sustenance for the hungry
- Mercy for those who care for others
- A family for those who are peacemakers

Just before he was arrested, Jesus was teaching his disciples in the parable of the sheep and the goats. He said to the sheep at his right hand – come, for when I was hungry you gave me food, when I was thirsty you gave me water, when I was cold you gave me clothes, when I was in prison you came to visit me. And the goats at his left hand with blindfolded eyes said, "When

did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or cold or in prison?? When?” And Jesus said, “when you didn’t do this for the least, the poor, the oppressed, you didn’t do it for me.”

Jesus takes our blindfolds off.

Now, my friends, I will be the first to say that this is confusing and sometimes quite difficult. I don’t have all the answers to address the ills of our society – heck, I don’t even know all the questions. But the words of Micah are a touchstone – do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God.

And, I would add to this – remember that we don’t do this alone. In our baptisms, for which gave thanks just a few moments ago, we are bound with Jesus' mission to make room for the poor in spirit, comfort those who mourn, feed the hungry, seek and show mercy to one another. And we have been brought into the community of faith. We gather together regularly. We tell the stories of our faith life. We support each other, we pray for each other, we help each other. We live in the Gospel. We hear God’s word. We are fed at the Lord’s Table.

What does the Lord require of us? To do justice, show mercy and walk humbly with our God.

May God give us eyes to see, ears to hear and a heart to respond.

Amen.