

What Is Good

COMMUNION

February 1, 2026

Micah 6:1-8

¹ Hear what the Lord is saying: Arise, lay out the lawsuit before the mountains; let the hills hear your voice! ² Hear, mountains, the lawsuit of the Lord! Hear, eternal foundations of the earth! The Lord has a lawsuit against his people; with Israel he will argue. ³ “My people, what did I ever do to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me! ⁴ I brought you up out of the land of Egypt; I redeemed you from the house of slavery. I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam before you. ⁵ My people, remember what Moab’s King Balak had planned, and how Balaam, Beor’s son, answered him! Remember everything from Shittim to Gilgal, that you might learn to recognize the righteous acts of the Lord!”

⁶ With what should I approach the Lord and bow down before God on high? Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings, with year-old calves? ⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with many torrents of oil? Should I give my oldest child for my crime; the fruit of my body for the sin of my spirit? ⁸ He has told you, human one, what is good and what the Lord requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.

1st Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But it is the power of God for those of us who are being saved. ¹⁹ It is written in scripture: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will reject the intelligence of the intelligent. ²⁰ Where are the wise? Where are the legal experts? Where are today’s debaters? Hasn’t God made the wisdom of the world foolish? ²¹ In God’s wisdom, he determined that the world wouldn’t come to know him through its wisdom. Instead, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching. ²² Jews ask for signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, which is a scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

²⁴ *But to those who are called — both Jews and Greeks — Christ is God’s power and God’s wisdom. ²⁵ This is because the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.*

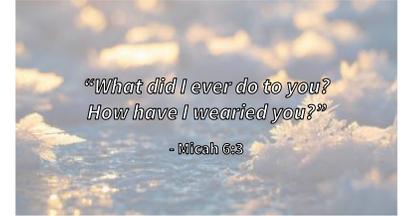


Micah 6 is about worship. While it begins with an indictment of Israel’s present worship practices, it turns in verse 8 focusing on how God desires for us to worship. Here we find the well-known call to “*do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.*” This is a passage that I read and pray through every morning when I begin the Bible study portion of my quiet time with God. In this verse and in the passage as a whole, we see that from God’s perspective, what we do outside of the formal time of worship matters much more than what we do during our hour or so together on a Sunday morning. As we prepare to wrestle with what the Lord requires of us, let us center our hearts and minds with a word of prayer...

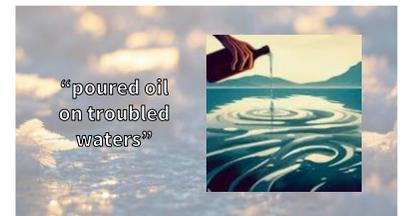
Gracious God, we come to you poor in spirit. Fill us with the riches of your Word. We come to you hungry for justice. Give us hope and joy. We come to you powerless in this violent world. May we inherit the world of your grace. We come to you desiring to be your peacemakers. Bless us that we might receive your Spirit and serve you in the name of Christ. It is with this hope that I ask you, O God, to bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

As we turn to the opening verses of Micah 6, we quickly see that God is not happy with the people of God. In verse 1 we see that God is going to “*lay out the lawsuit before the mountains.*” God is about to bring charges against Israel, using creation as God’s witness.

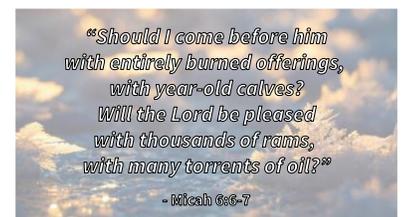
In verse 3 God poses two questions: *“What did I ever do to you? How have I wearied you?”* As we consider these questions, what might have prompted God to ask Israel these questions? What might our lives look like, what might our worship look like to prompt God to ask such questions of us?



God then reminds Israel of all that God has done on their behalf. God reminds Israel of how God led them out of slavery in Egypt, giving Moses and Aaron and Miriam as their guides to the Promised Land. The people are reminded of God’s rescue from Moab and of how God has taught them to recognize God’s righteous acts. What would be on your short list of the things that God has done for you? When has God redeemed or restored or even rescued you? When has the Spirit come alongside you, guiding and leading you? When has the Lord parted the stormy waters or lifted you out of the dark valley? When, as the old expression goes, when has God “poured oil on troubled waters?”



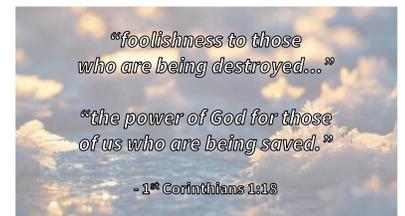
This expression originated a long time ago. Ancient ship captains would carry a small vial of oil with them when at sea because it was believed that oil poured upon the waters during a storm would bring smoother sailing. The sea captains hoped to never have to use these vials, but they clung to them steadfastly – just in case. The idea of oil placating “stormy waters,” so to speak, is also found in our Micah passage and in the faith lives of ancient Israel. Wondering aloud about might please or placate the Lord, the psalmist asks, *“Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings, with year-old calves? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with many torrents of oil?”* The psalmist wonders, how much is enough?



This is a question that we can wrestle with too, isn't it? During our best of times, we can wonder, how much does it take to please God? Here we are wrestling with our central question today: What is good? But when we are at our worst, we can wonder, how much does it take to buy off God or to get God to do our will? In the context of this passage, we might wonder, what is required from us for God to smooth the troubled waters of our life or the lives of those we love? Also, in the context of this passage and the time in which it was written, would a thousand-dollar offering do it? Would feeding the homeless a few weekends a month fill the bill? Would spending extra time in prayer or Bible study each day convince God to smooth those troubled waters or to otherwise meet our expectations? The truth is, when our waters are troubled, we often turn to bargaining with the Lord our God.



As we turn to our Epistle passage, to 1st Corinthians 1, we gain some insights into these kinds of struggles with God and with the living out of our faith. In this passage, Paul is urging the churches in Corinth and the believers that make up these churches to trust in the wisdom and way of God – instead of the way of the world. For Paul, the wisdom and way of God is found in the way of love modeled on the cross. The message of the cross is *“foolishness to those who are being destroyed.”* The way of love and a life of sacrificial service – yes, it is foolishness to many in our world today. In our culture that exults self and personal satisfaction over the communal good and the well-being of all people. Yes, to these folks, the way of love and service exemplified in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross - it is foolishness. But the way of the world is the way that leads to destruction, not to abundant life now and to eternal life in the age to come.



In contrast, when we choose to live the way of love, then the cross holds “*the power of God for those of us who are being saved.*” This choice is one that the faithful must make each day. It is a daily choice because of the world in which we live and because of the flawed flesh that exists in each one of us. In Paul’s writings, he contrasts faithful living with the ways of the religious and the academic – the Jews and the Greeks. Today Paul would address those who seek to explain away God, to disprove Jesus’ existence with eloquent words and theories – with the wisdom of this world. You see, there have always been people who do not believe the Bible or who cannot accept God’s word as truth to live by.

In the same way, there have always been people who have sought to use their religion to hold power over others or to look down on those who did not align with their views. Jesus frequently addressed the religious leaders of his day – those Pharisees and Sadducees who were prideful and arrogant, who used religion as a barrier to exclude rather than as a way to build faith and community. We see both of these things in some religious circles today.

If Paul were writing today, though, I believe that he would address another group of people as well. In our world today, we have seen the rise of folks who want to make Jesus into something else entirely. The humble servant, the sacrificial lamb? This is not the Jesus of too many in our world today. The one who came to care for the least of these, to heal the broken, to provide for those in need, to draw others into community and belonging, to protect the orphan, widow, and alien among us? This is not the Jesus of too many in our world and nation today. The self-glorifying and power-seeking of too many “Christians” today is a scandal and is foolishness – not to the Jews and Gentiles of our day, but to the Lord our God. These behaviors would also surely be condemned by Micah if he were alive today.

To try and impress God and one's fellow man? To try to outgive or outsmart God and one's fellow human beings? To all of this, Micah would say, 'Don't be ridiculous.' If we were to try and give a thousand rivers or oil or a thousand whatever's, it would be just a small drop in God's bucket. If we were to try, as Micah ponders in verse 7, to give "*the fruit of my body for the sin of my flesh,*" we would be reminded that we and our children have been God's since we and they were formed in the womb. And through the power of the cross, we and our children and all of those who believe, we have been ransomed and forgiven and redeemed. More on than as we later turn to the sacrament of holy communion.

We cannot buy off God because God has already given us the desire of our heart. We are beloved and we belong to God and to God's family. We cannot do anything to get into God's good grace. Grace has always been ours. We cannot bend or change God's will and way. The heart of God has always been bent towards mercy and justice and peace. So, what, my friends, can we do for God? What would be pleasing and what would bring joy to the heart of God? The answer is found in Micah 6:8. Here we read what is good and what the Lord requires of us: "*to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.*"



God tells us what is good and what is required by God: to do justice, to love faithfully, and to walk humbly with God. These three actions form three centers around which the Christian life is to be lived. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, called these words the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. These three actions can be both very simple and incredibly difficult. There are times when what is just is very clear and we are totally committed to bringing justice to a given situation. There are times when it is easy to right a wrong. And there are times when justice is complex and there is a price to be paid. This is more difficult.

There are times when it is easy to love faithfully. When someone we know is hurting or is in need of help or support or whatever, in these times we'd give an arm or a leg or the shirt off of our back. And there are times when it is hard to love at all, never mind faithfully. When someone has hurt us or one we love, when someone is making a choice that we think is evil or wrong, when God has not prevented suffering in our life or in our world – in these times it can be hard or difficult or challenging to love faithfully, to love as God would love us in these situations.

And there are times when humility comes easily. There are times and circumstances when we just know we were blessed or guided or directed by God and we know that all the glory and all the credit belong to God alone. There are times when another has served or cared for or loved or forgiven us in ways that go beyond being a good person. Humility wells up in us in times such as these. And then there are times when it is our pride or ego or stubbornness that rises up in us, taking us to a place that is far from walking humbly with God.

In spite of the challenges and difficulties, in spite of the flesh that dwells in each of us, this remains what God requires of us, and it is what is good: *“to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.”* When we make the intentional choice to live this way, day after day, we soon discover that these three things are intertwined and are, in fact, often hard to separate. When we see God in one another, when we love one another as God loves us, when we live in right and just relationships, then we open up the possibility of becoming like oil poured out on troubled waters. When we are doing and being good in the world, doing and being as God requires us to do and be, then peace and justice, forgiveness and grace, love and mercy will flow out into the world. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.



Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. To be just, to love faithfully, to walk humbly. This is our call. Which is hardest for you on a day-to-day basis? Focus on that this week as you seek to grow in your faith.
- 2) *Pray*. Do you sometimes struggle with accepting and living into God's will and way? Name a few struggles before God and asks for strength in these battles.
- 3) *Study*. Read 1st Corinthians 1:26-30. How do these verses encourage you in your call to do justice, to love faithfully, and to walk humbly with God and with one another?