

Fourth Sunday After Epiphany – February 2, 2020
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Micah 6:1-8

Listen now to what the Lord is saying! Get up. Plead your case to the mountains. Let the hills hear your voice. 2) Listen, you mountains, to the accusation from the Lord. Pay attention, you enduring foundations of the earth, because the Lord is presenting a case against his people, and he is indicting Israel. 3) **My people, what have I done to you, and how have I made you weary?** Answer me! 4) I was the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt. I redeemed you from the place where you were slaves. I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam ahead of you. 5) My people, remember what Balak king of Moab planned, and how Balaam son of Beor responded to him when you were about to travel from Shittim to Gilgal, so that you may acknowledge the Lord's righteous acts. 6) With what am I to appear before the Lord? How should I bow down to God on high? Should I appear before him with burnt offerings, with one-year-old calves? 7) Will the Lord be delighted with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of streams of oil? Should I give my firstborn for my rebellion, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 8) He has told you, mankind, what is good. What does the Lord require from you, except to carry out justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God? (EHV®)

Dear Friends in Christ;

Merchants often have a customer service desk or phone number where a consumer can lodge a complaint if a product or service doesn't meet the customer's satisfaction. Perhaps while you've been traveling or shopping you stopped at a rest room and noticed a sign on the door or near the entry telling you whom to contact if the restroom is lacking in supplies or needs some attention. We're used to having ways to voice our concerns and to achieve a resolution to our problems. As a last resort a consumer may even take their case to court.

But where does God go when he has a complaint to lodge against his people? Often he used his prophets as his mouth piece taking his complaint directly to the source – having the prophets point out the sins and offences his people had committed on him. Sadly the Lord's complaints often fell on deaf ears. As we read our text for today we almost get the sense that the Lord has taken his people to court as he calls upon the mountains to listen to his complaints and for the people to plead their case before the mountains. It's almost as if the Lord is asking the mountains to judge between him and his people. They are well qualified to serve as judge and jury because they have witnessed both the Lord's goodness to Israel and Israel's unfaithfulness. Mount Sinai saw the Lord enter into an agreement with his people as the Lord promised his blessings and commanded their obedience saying. (Exodus 19:5 EHV) **Now if you will carefully listen to my voice and keep my covenant, then you will be my special treasure out of all the nations.** (Exodus 19:8 EHV) **All the people answered together, "Everything that the Lord has said, we will do."**

It was at the base of this mountain while the Lord was still giving the terms of his covenant to Moses that God's people formed and fashioned a calf and hailed it as the god who had lead them out of Egypt.

It was at Mount Zion in Jerusalem where the Lord's temple was built and where the Savior drew his people near to himself by establishing his presence their and giving them the opportunity to bring their offerings to him – offerings showing their repentance and desire for his forgiveness and grace.

It was in the hillsides of Canaan that the ancient Israelites often practiced idolatry – worshipping the Baals and engaging in shameful acts in fertility rituals – causing the hills, if they could, to blush with shame.

It's in this court that the

Theme: The Lord Lays the Evidence on the Line

1. Evidence of his grace and faithfulness
2. Evidence of the rebellion of his people

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In his role as the prosecuting attorney the Lord presents his opening arguments if you will by leading off with a series of questions – ones which you and I ultimately are compelled to answer as well.

My people, what have I done to you, and how have I made you weary? Answer me! Amazingly the Lord has not turned away from his people – he simply couldn't in spite of their unfaithfulness. He loved them they were his covenant people. From them in the fullness of time the promised Savior would come. And it is just because he loved them that he lays it on the line for them – bringing his charges against them that they might be convicted and turn back to him in repentance.

The case is a case of the Lord's faithfulness versus the unfaithfulness of his people. Israel was unable to mention even one example where the Lord had been unfaithful or unjust to them. They stood mute before the mountains and so the Lord continues laying it on the line bringing into evidence his grace and faithfulness toward his people. **I was the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt. I redeemed you from the place where you were slaves. I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam ahead of you. 5) My people, remember what Balak king of Moab planned, and how Balaam son of Beor responded to him when you were about to travel from Shittim to Gilgal, so that you may acknowledge the Lord's righteous acts.**

Exhibit "A" The Lord brought his people out of Egypt – delivering them from their bitter slavery: just as he promised.

Exhibit "A-1" The Lord provided a wonderful picture of the spiritual rescue he would provide when his Son would be sacrificed as the true Passover lamb when he commanded them to paint the blood of a lamb on their door posts to spare the life of the first born when the angel carried out his mission in Egypt.

Exhibit "B" The Lord did not leave them on their own to wander through the remote desert regions between Egypt and Canaan. He provided them with faithful (although not always appreciated leaders.) There was Moses who served as the Lord's spokesman and their leader. There was Aaron, Moses brother, who served as a spokesman for Moses and as a priest for the people. And lastly there was Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron who served as a prophetess. The Lord was faithful: just as he promised.

Exhibit "C" When evil kings and rulers like Balak tried to prevent the nation of Israel from entering the land of promise the Lord took control of the situation. Balak hired Balaam to pronounce a curse on the Lord's people – but Balaam was only allowed to speak blessings on the Lord's people – 4 different times even uttering a promise of the Savior. (Check out the complete evidence in Numbers 22 and following.) Once again the Lord protected his people: just as he promised.

Exhibit "D" The final leg of Israel's journey to the land of promise extended from Shittim to Gilgal which was between the Jordan and Jericho in the land of promise. Shittim was the last camping place before the nation of people crossed the Jordan. Sadly it was here that the Lord's people once again demonstrated their unfaithfulness to him – committing sexual sins with the Moabites and joining in their heathen worship. In

justice the Lord punished the people for their sins –but he did not reject them. He miraculously led them into the land of promise: just as he promised.

The Lord did all this that Israel might know the righteousness acts of the Lord – he showed them the righteousness of his Law by punishing their sin; and the righteousness of his promise to bring them safely into Canaan. The bottom line: The Lord is faithful: just as he promises. Repeat it with me: **THE LORD IS FAITHFUL: JUST AS HE PROMISES.**

And with that the Lord rests his case. The Israelites take the stand and begin to speak in their own defense: **With what am I to appear before the Lord? How should I bow down to God on high? Should I appear before him with burnt offerings, with one-year-old calves? 7) Will the Lord be delighted with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of streams of oil? Should I give my firstborn for my rebellion, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?**

It's a pretty weak defense – really it's no defense at all – it's rationalizations, it's excuses. They stood convicted before the Lord. They had been unfaithful time after time. And there excuses are really further evidence of their unfaithfulness. Did they now come to the Lord with their pleas of guilty seeking his mercy – the mercy foreshadowed by the Passover lambs. Unfortunately they only tried to justify themselves – they question the Lord asking, “What shall we do?” “How can we make amends?” Their questions almost seem to be a sarcastic ridicule of the Lord's demands. They seem to be looking for a way to bribe the Lord just as they were accustomed to bribing the corrupt officials of their times.

So what will it take Lord they ask: burnt offerings, calves a year old? How about quantity? Is that what you're looking for, Lord? Maybe thousands of rams or 10 thousand rivers of sacrificial oil?

Or maybe you are like the gods of our heathen neighbors who offered up their own children – a practice which although forbidden by the Lord was actually copied by wicked kings like Ahaz and Manassa. Thankfully the practice was not wide spread.

In summation the people were acknowledging their guilt but they were placing their hope on their works rather than the grace of God. The guilty Israelites of Micah's day were willing to do anything to please God – except what he wanted. He wanted the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart. (cf. Psalm 51:17) But all they wanted to offer was more of their works – hoping that somehow they might find just the right thing which would cause God to change his mind about their sin.

But how could a just God change his mind about sin? How could a just God abandon his promise to send a Savior to provide a rescue from sin. The Lord would remain faithful to his Law and to his Gospel.

An exasperated prophet now address the Lord's people: **He has told you, mankind, what is good. What does the Lord require from you, except to carry out justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?** Micah addressed his words to each individual. Had they not seen what is good? Surely the Lord had showed them through the testimony and example of his prophets whom they had rejected time and time again?

This is what the Lord requires – to carry out justice – to live up to the standards of the Lord's Law. Number 1: It means worshipping the Lord God alone and not the idols of the nations. It means trusting in the Lord rather than themselves, their money, their efforts and wisdom. Number 2: It means treating their fellow human beings with love and respect – loving them as they loved themselves. To love mercy – to treat each other with an attitude of forgiveness. Number 3: to walk humbly with the Lord – God pleasing humility is only

present when we see ourselves as God sees us, as sinners deserving the wages of death for our sins, as imperfect creatures who need the forgiveness won for us by Christ? Such humility goes along with God's plans for our salvation, holding on to the forgiveness offered by the Lord and seeking to live a godly life in appreciation for his wonderful grace. Perhaps you recognize the 10 commandments in these statements? The Lord Jesus summarized the law in this way: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. Micah's summary is just as beautiful: **To carry out justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God.**

Both our Lord's words and Micah's words are intended to show us the impossibility of meeting God's standards on our own. As we examine our lives in the mirror of God's law – what do we see? We see that we have been unfaithful. We are guilty as charged. We've made excuses for our actions. We have not acted justly. We have not always shown mercy. We do not always walk humbly before our God. We've been unfaithful just as Israel was unfaithful. Repeat it with me. **WE'VE BEEN UNFAITHFUL JUST AS ISRAEL WAS UNFAITHFUL.**

The Lord has laid the evidence on the line for us: Over and over again the evidence is clear – we have been unfaithful to our God and yet He's been faithful to his promises: sending his son to be our Savior, washing away our sins in baptism, bringing us into his family. We've said it ourselves: **THE LORD IS FAITHFUL: JUST AS HE PROMISES. WE'VE BEEN UNFAITHFUL JUST AS ISRAEL WAS UNFAITHFUL.**

The verdict is in: (Romans 3:20-24 EHV) **No one will be declared righteous in his sight by works of the law, for through the law we become aware of sin. 21) But now, completely apart from the law, a righteousness from God has been made known. The Law and the Prophets testify to it. 22) This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all and over all who believe. In fact, there is no difference, 23) because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God 24) and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.**

Not guilty for Christ's sake. That's the verdict.

(2 Corinthians 5:15 EHV) reminds us: **[Christ] died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again.**

Sadly rebellious Israel refused to look to the Lord for his forgiveness. May God grant that we will look to him in faith. May that faith be the basis for our justice, our mercy and our humble walk with the Lord. Amen.