

TEACHER



image: Common Dreams

Micah 6:1-8 NRSV

1 Hear what the Lord says:

Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.

2 Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord,
and you enduring foundations of the earth;
for the Lord has a controversy with his people,
and he will contend with Israel.

3 “O my people, what have I done to you?

In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

4 For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.

5 O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,

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LECTIONARY
LESSON 5

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and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.”

6 “With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

8 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?

Background

Faith based civil rights activists use this eighth verse in our passage to justify a claim about justice and righteousness. It is often used to remind *all* people that God requires both worship and work for a better world. We do not know much about Micah and his life, but we do know that he was from a small town called Moresheth in southern Judah. The totality of the text reflects his own personal gripes with the abuses of power in his community. In the third chapter, you will find indictments of community leaders and rebukes against false prophets. Though small, the book of Micah is powerful. He still ends this text with praise to God. In your own devotional period, challenge yourself to imagine what Micah may say if he lived today.

Today’s lesson will focus on God’s unexpected requirements.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with a partner. What does God’s voice sound like to you?

What’s happening during this passage?

In this passage, we again see God guiding people *through* the testimony of the prophet. First, God reminds the people of God’s faithfulness. Using the image of a le-

gal “case,” God provides evidence. The people are instructed to “plead their case” before the mountains. God begins with opening arguments.

“What have I done to you? Hello? I’m talking to you! Do you not remember how I brought you out of Egypt and from slavery? How I sent you three different kinds of leaders? Do you not know what danger I have spared you from?”

Perhaps this reminder, and in such an intense tone, would make people nervous. Perhaps they may be wondering how to get back on God’s good side. Micah, maybe sarcastically, asks rhetorical questions. “Should I lay prostrate at the altar? Should I bring burnt offerings? Thousands of rams? Rivers of oil? My first born? My good mink?” But God doesn’t ask for any of that. God simply responds through Micah’s voice, “what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Why these things?

Do Justice. Love Kindness (or “mercy” in some translations). Walk humbly with your God. Everyone can do these things. No matter what you have, where you’re from, how you were raised, what you lack, what you own, everyone can do these three simple things. God calls us to do the right thing. To love. And to walk with our Lord in our everyday life. It seems so simple, but God wants *these* things. Not massive monuments or rivers of oil. And even though these things are simple, they are difficult.

Why does God name Moses, Aaron and Miriam?

For the people of this time, Moses, Aaron and Miriam were like the equivalent of naming Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Howard Thurman and Nina Simone. Or for today’s time, Stacy Abrams, Ta-Nehisi Coates and Solange. Or maybe another trio. Moses was the leader who challenged Pharaoh and led the people out of Egypt with God’s help. Aaron was Moses’ mouthpiece, as Moses was not as confident in his public speaking skills. And Miriam helped the people celebrate. She led the community in protest song and dance when Pharaoh’s chariots fell into the sea.

God knows that these particular people care about these three figures. God intervened in history through Moses, Aaron and Miriam. It takes people like these three to make God’s plan for freedom come together. Likewise, God may be making a case for more leaders. And in order for more leaders to emerge, people must follow the principles of “doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God.” By this time, Moses, Aaron and Miriam are long gone. But there is still work left to be done.

Why do people think God wants big offerings?

Zora Neale Hurston once said, “Gods always behave like the people who make them.” Human beings think God wants Stuff because humans want Stuff. Have you ever been hurt by someone? And instead of them saying sorry for hurting you, they try to butter you up with gifts or favors? God doesn’t want bracelets, expensive bags, golf clubs, fancy vacations, the latest sneakers or five star dinners. God just wants us to do the right thing. It’s simple, and that’s why it’s so hard for us to understand. How could a big God be satisfied with me “doing justice, loving kindness (or mercy) and walking humbly with my God?” Maybe because those actions help foster a stronger relationship. God wants a relationship with us so that we can be grounded to make this world a better place.

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?

Encourage students to highlight parts of the passage that still make them curious. Be sure to check in with them next Sunday about what they’re still curious about.

Connection to Today’s World

One of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s last projects was the Poor People’s Campaign. This was an effort to uplift the needs of the most vulnerable in America by drawing attention to militarism, capitalism and racism. In the last few years, a community has revived this effort. Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis and Rev. Dr. William Barber are among several leaders reinstating the Poor People’s Campaign. In their own words, our faith has been used by some to “serve hate, fear, racism and greed.” Instead, we must fight



to expand and preserve protections for the oppressed majority of this nation. This organization spends time organizing protests, hearings, workshops, voter registration drives and bible studies. Frequently in sermons, speeches and interviews, Dr. Barber and Dr. Theoharis quote Micah 6:8. It is a reminder that all of our work

must boil down to these very simple acts. Doing Justice. Loving Mercy. Walking humbly with our God.

Journal: Do Justice. Love mercy (or kindness). Walk humbly with your God. Choose one of these commands and imagine how it might look for you in your daily life.

Closing: Sing “*Lord Prepare Me*”

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary.

Pure and holy, tried and true.

With thanksgiving I’ll be a living

Sanctuary, Lord, for You.

Prayer:

Dear God,

You are the God of Moses, Aaron and Miriam. You have brought generations of our people through major obstacles.

We are an easily swayed people. Sometimes we think that Stuff will make you happy, because Stuff makes us happy. Convict us, Lord. Show us that there are other ways to show love and care besides material offerings. Help us to pursue relationships that strengthen us. Give us the space to reflect on our behavior in this world. When we are not doing justice, loving mercy, or walking humbly with you, send us reminders that correct our path. We need you to gather us for the glory of your Kingdom.

In Jesus’ name we pray,

Amen

Works Cited

<https://www.npr.org/2018/10/31/659837563/preaching-gospel-of-love-and-justice-william-barber-mobilizes-progressive-christ>

<https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/about/our-principles/>