

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 2, 2020
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

Micah 6:1-8 Listen to what the Lord says:
“Stand up, plead my case before the mountains;
let the hills hear what you have to say.
2 “Hear, you mountains, the Lord’s accusation;
listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth.
For the Lord has a case against his people;
he is lodging a charge against Israel.
3 “My people, what have I done to you?
How have I burdened you? Answer me.
4 I brought you up out of Egypt
and redeemed you from the land of slavery.
I sent Moses to lead you,
also Aaron and Miriam.
5 My people, remember
what Balak king of Moab plotted
and what Balaam son of Beor answered.
Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord.”
6 With what shall I come before the Lord
and bow down before the exalted God?
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 thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly[a] with your God.

“Your God Fights for You”

Some things are just worth fighting over. But squabbling over others can make you look downright silly. Emotions spill over when roommates fight of whose turn it is to do the dishes. But when Grandma’s prized jewelry divides a family, it is downright shameful. Splitting up the entire inventory of a home can go from tedious to tragic. But when children get caught in the middle of a nasty custody battle, it’s heartbreaking.

In Micah chapter six we hear a court case. The Lord brings his people to court. There are accusations and insinuations. But there is one thing God wants to make clear through the

whole thing. God wants his people back. And He is willing to fight for them. That means you. Your God fights for you.

Here's the first big takeaway from these verses. God cares. God cares enough to address his people. He's carrying out a spiritual intervention of sorts. Because if God didn't care, he would just let his people go. He would watch as they went out to do their own thing. God would let them go their own way and just write them off as a lost cause.

In any legal proceedings, you need evidence. God calls the surrounding environment around his people as witnesses: **"Stand up, plead my case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say."** (Micah 6:1) This is just a poetic way of saying God has round the clock surveillance on his people. Better than video cameras in every public building, more attentive than Alexa inside our private places, God knows every thought, every word, every action of every man, woman and child on the planet.

But God takes an unusual approach in this case. Instead of rolling out all that evidence against his people, God opens with a loving appeal: **"My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me."** (Micah 6:3) And then, instead of pointing out every crime and infraction against him, every episode of abuse or rebellion, he offers them exhibits of his love and faithfulness: **"I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord."** (Micah 6:4,5) This isn't just a history lesson. This is God's way of showing his powerful acts of deliverance and rescue, his loving guidance and presence, the way he overcame the schemes of their enemies and responded graciously when they were unfaithful. God isn't defensive. He's just giving evidence of everything he's done for his people.

Yet, there is the implied complaint that God has done them wrong and caused them to become worn out. Think of how easy it is for people to turn away from God without really even carefully considering who he is and what he's really after. They figure it's impossible to live up to God's expectations, so I might as well have fun smashing through all of God's commands. They may even reason that Christians are just hypocrites, pretending to be better than everyone else.

So many symptoms we see all around us are just evidence that people feel like trying to please God would be more than they are capable of. So they pour themselves into friendships. Friends will be there for them when they need them. And if that means gossiping about others who think they are better than we are, what's the harm? If it means pointing out the weirdos and the kids that make us feel uneasy, at least they've been put on notice. It's why people develop casual attitudes about sex. Sometimes it is nice just to know someone desires you, thinks you are attractive, worthy of their affection. And as long as no one gets hurt, what does it matter what I do with my own body? And if I'm not getting the affection I want when I want it from my spouse, what business is it of anyone else if I spend time looking at porn? It's why people spend money on things they may or may not be

able to afford. That truck would make me feel more confident in myself. A few more items to add to my wardrobe would make me feel special. Adding a few more items to the online shopping cart will give me that little dopamine hit, a momentary high that I won't have to deal with until I get my credit card bill.

Jim Carrey pulled back the curtain, saying, "I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer."⁹

God's people can feel overwhelmed even when we are doing our best to serve God faithfully. Here is how the Israelites answered God's accusations against them: **"With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"** (Micah 6:6,7) You can hear the frustration as they answer God. Their argument goes from pushing back about the quality to the quantity, then to the ridiculous and downright sinfully slapping God in the face with their pushback against God. What would be enough for God: sacrifices? Lots of sacrifices? When would he be truly satisfied: with my most prized possessions? My own cherished children?

God's people get worn out. We want to give up. We are here in church even when it is a challenge to get here. We serve God when we have so much to do already. We sit down with the Bible in personal Bible study and gather the family together for a devotion while things are already chaotic. We put money in the offering plate when it's what we actually need to live off. We try to show compassion for people in our lives, and then realize there is always one more person to help. When will it be enough? How much will it take to satisfy God?

A young pastor recently admitted to feeling unfulfilled. All his major life's goals had become reality. He got married and started a family. He graduated from seminary and arrived at his first church. For years, for most of his life, that was all he wanted. Now he is wondering if that's all there is.

God's people actually know. Micah says: **"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good."** (Micah 6:8) It's not a case of ignorance. What does God really want? Micah makes it simple: **"To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."** (Micah 6:8) God's primary concern isn't with stuff. It's you. He wants your obedience. He wants your love. He wants your very life and your entire heart. But most of all God wants you. He wants His people to be his own.

But everything the Lord wants from his people, he gives to them. Freely. Without cost. Without effort from them. Without any strings attached.

We have it all in Jesus. God is pleased with Jesus giving himself in your place. Jesus streams his never-ending faithfulness to refresh and satisfy God's heart. God gave up his first-born, his only-begotten, his most prized possession when Jesus came to this earth. Jesus was cut down in the prime of his life for the sins of every soul. And now because Jesus offered

himself, you can come before God and bow down before him in humble confidence. You can approach your God with the life of Jesus dedicated to your rescue. You can confront your God with the gift he gave to you when he gave you Jesus.

Be honest, what's your first reaction when you hear the Beatitudes, the words of blessing Jesus speaks in Matthew chapter five? When Jesus lists of all the people whom he considers blessed — the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the pure, the persecuted and insulted — does it sound like maybe this section of Scripture should be renamed the Beat-up-itudes? Like anyone who actually tries to live by these standards will be miserable instead of happily blessed? But Jesus is teaching us something bigger, something deeper about life with him. When we place all the things in life that we think are so important lower on life's priority ladder, we have a more fulfilling life. When we replace all the stuff we want from life and to accumulate for life with the one standing behind those gifts, when we put the Giver of those above the stuff, we are truly blessed. When we have God as our ultimate joy and meaning in life, all that other stuff fades to the background. By faith in Jesus, hearers can and do claim all those Beatitude blessings.

Your God fights for you. You belong to him. You have a blessed life through faith in Jesus Christ. The blessed life of Jesus is yours.

What does life with God look like in the life of a believer? Seeing myself as God sees me, a sinner deserving of the ultimate condemnation in his divine courtroom and punishment in the unending prison of hell, but redeemed and rescued, retrieved and given new life. God wants to be with you. God wants to enjoy each moment of every day with you in his presence. God's people: **“walk humbly with your God.”** (Micah 6:8) Not walking away from him or fighting against him; not walking in the same general direction as God or on a parallel path to God. God's people can give God an attitude of the heart: “to love mercy.” (Micah 6:8) It's the exact opposite of preying up the weak and taking advantage of the less fortunate. So now God's people can give God something visible, something that can be seen: **“To act justly.”** (Micah 6:8)

Life with God means invitation instead of avoidance. Come closer to God and understand more deeply what God can deliver, what none of the other stuff in life can actually give you. God gives you friends to be a blessing in your life. But no friend will be perfect. None of them can live up to that standard. When your best friend from second grade moves away, God is still there for you. When your friends make fun of you because you turn out to be the weird one, your God still accepts you through the merits of Jesus Christ. When you realize how hurtful it is to gossip about another friend, God shows you his long-term commitment when those other friends turn on you. When sex fails to make you feel special, God is still there. When you feel dirty and ashamed because of what you've done to make someone desire you, God is there to wash you and cleanse you in the blood of Jesus. When you are rejected, God says he chooses you to be his bride. When pornography fails to give you that short term satisfaction, God's forgiveness gives you identity for the long-term. When the stuff you keep buying starts to wear out, when you have to keep buying more and more to satisfy your cravings, God shows you the peace and security he provides free of charge.

On the way home from church last week I heard on the radio about the helicopter crash that took the life of Kobe Bryant and his teenage daughter. Over the past week, it's been remarkable how many people have been impacted by that death. Not just that Kobe was one of the best to play the game of basketball. Not just that he closed out an amazing career. But that he had successfully transitioned from a life of being feared on the basketball court to being adored by his daughters. That he had become a more complete human being.

Make no mistake, Micah chapter six is about having a more complete life. God wants to be involved in your entire life. God just wants to spend time with you as you come to him in worship, in personal Bible study and family devotions. God just wants to enjoy family projects with you as he allows you to serve together with him in his kingdom. God wants you to have the joy of giving him your best, the first fruits of your financial gifts. How much is enough? God wants you, your heart, your life, your obedience. God wants you. And He's willing to fight for you. Amen.