

Micah, Beatitudes

The words of our lessons today may prove so familiar that we are lulled into peaceful satisfaction. We hear how God has acted to save Israel from slavery in Egypt. How Jesus' actions save us from this world of corruption, establishing God's kingdom for the poor, hungry, and sorrowing.

We are soothed by Micah's words about justice and mercy, hear ourselves called 'blessed' and can return to our homes re-assured. It would be so easy to allow the ritual and the music and familiar words to wash gently over us.

And if by chance what **you** need today is to hear that God loves you just as you are – that you are God's beloved – always have been, always will be. If what you **need today** is to have your wounds bound up and to know God is a safe place to make your home – then please know that these things are true – for you – today and tomorrow. May the presence of God today give you peace.

However, we also know that the Creator God both comforts and challenges.....we know that the truth of which Jesus speaks is the cross and that we humans are most adept at pulling the wool over our own eyes....

For those of us who begin to squirm when the words Justice and Mercy and Humility come out of a prophet's mouth.....those of us who know that the word 'blessed' has nothing to do with comfort

and that the love of neighbor which Jesus commands is a constant learning experience and struggle

FOR US – these familiar lessons throw into a harsh spotlight the reality of the systems in which we operate freely while spelling out God's expectations for God's beloved children: that we DO justice, LOVE mercy and walk HUMBLY with our God.

Every year words like these challenge us to align our choices and our actions with a Creator who **brings into being** a time and place where the weak and weeping, the hungry and harassed are truly blessed, truly valued, and truly welcome.....welcome without concern about hair color, food stamps, unemployment, additions, ethnic background and all the rest.

Micah's words challenge us to **be the laborers** in the kingdom actively at work -**doing justice** by repairing and replacing systems that fail to serve the weakest. **Loving mercy** not just by our on-going care for the hungry which could use a few more volunteers, but in personal actions large and small,

In generosity that grows beyond old habits.

Micah challenges us to pay attention to the way we walk with God, putting aside our boasting and taking up the humility of a savior who washed his disciples' feet.

I say all this because - under the cover of darkness - injustice has struck again, taking yet again the life of a young black man. His name is Tyre Nichols and he died at the hands of people who look too much like me and you;

people armed with batons and tasers and the power and authority of the state.

And although none of us raised a hand against him and none of us were in a position to intervene to save his life,

I think we need to confess that we have spent a great deal of time and effort ignoring and denying our skewed attitudes about and against our neighbors of color. We have excused ourselves by claiming we were raised this way....without doing the work to learn new ways.

So it's happened again in this country where we claim to welcome all, where we choose who governs us, where we have the power to hold accountable those who terrorize rather than protect.

It is in this context that we hear Micah's words.... And hear Jesus lay out before us a world powered not by survival of the fittest but by justice and mercythe very values that lie at the center of Divine Love.

Just outside our doors lie the fields where our labor is needed-

Where there are people who have no space that is safe

Where there are people who are counted 'less worthy'

Where there are young people trying to find their way,

old people isolated and frightened, spouses and children living in fear.

Just **outside** our doors are candidates seeking office and public officials asking for our trust. Micah reminds us today that our trust comes with a demand for justice and mercy for all.

And just INSIDE our doors you and I both know we have sins to confess, old habits to dissolve, new language and new practices to learn.

It is hard work and we have avoided it too long: we've avoided seeing the truth of ourselves because like Adam and Eve in the garden we are ashamed and we want to hide. We want to live in the blessed kingdom without doing the hard work it requires.

The litany of victims is already too long, and I have too few years left to make a difference, to touch a life, to do my own small share. My work is not done. Our work is not donebecause God's work is not finished.

So I will end with the Prayer of Commendation that comes from our funeral liturgy so that these are the last words you hear

Into you hands o merciful savior we commend your servant Tyre Nichols.
Acknowledge we humbly beseech you a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming. Receive him into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace and into the glorious company of the saints in light.

And the people of God say... Amen