



What Does God Require of Us?

TEXT
Micah 6:1–8

October 13, 2019 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

The first thing I noticed when the plane landed in Buffalo, New York, was the snow and ice. I was there to preach at a church in West Buffalo, and it was February. I did not plan this very well. I did not check the weather. When I left Atlanta, it was 64 degrees. It was 27 degrees in Buffalo. My hosts picked me up at the airport and took me to a nice dinner. Then they dropped me off at the hotel.

When I was unpacking, I realized I did not have any shaving cream. I called the front desk to see if they had shaving cream. They did not. Then I asked if there was anywhere nearby where I might buy some shaving cream. They told me the only place in walking distance was a convenience store attached to a gas station. It was directly across the freeway from the hotel, but I would need to walk about half a mile to get to the overpass and then walk back half a mile to get to the gas station. I did not have boots or a long heavy coat or gloves or a scarf. I did not pack very well.

So, I put on everything I could to stay warm and walked. I got to the gas station and walked into the small convenience store.

I noticed that behind the thick plexiglass, there was a shelf with toothpaste and deodorant and, sure enough, small canisters of shaving cream. There was a woman there with big hair. I went up to the little hole in the plexiglass and said, “Good evening. I am looking for shaving cream.”

She looked at me, then looked out at the gas pumps and, seeing no car, she looked back at me and said, “Where did you come from?”

I said, “Well, I’m actually from Atlanta, and I’m staying at the hotel across the freeway.”

She looked at me and said, “Did you walk here?”

I told her “yes,” then explained that I just needed to buy some shaving cream from the shelf behind her.

She was staring at me and asked, “Why are you here?”

And I said, “To buy some shaving cream ... from the shelf ... right behind you.”

She asked again, “No, why are you here in Buffalo?”

And I replied, “Well, I actually am preaching at a Presbyterian church somewhere near here in the morning.”

She looked at me skeptically and said, “You are a Presbyterian preacher?”

And I said, “Well, yes, kinda. And I really just need some shaving cream. It’s right on the shelf behind you.”

As she turned around to get it, I said, “You know, if you’re not working in the morning, and if you don’t have a place to worship, please come.”

She said, “To a Presbyterian church?”

And I said, “Yes. It’s supposed to be around here somewhere.”

Then she said, “Honey, I can’t go to a Presbyterian church.”

Then I asked, “Well, why not?”

She said, “Because ... I’m not good enough to be a Presbyterian.” She further went on to tell me that not only was she not good enough, she was neither smart enough nor rich enough to be a Presbyterian.

Somehow, this woman had gotten the idea that in order to come to church, you had to be good. In order to come to church, you had to appear perfect — as if your life was great all the time. And you had to be smart. And you had to be rich.

That was the problem that Micah saw when he looked at the Hebrew people. He saw people who were more caught

up in their appearances, more attentive to their religious rituals than to the injustices and inequality all around them. He yearned for a people who would demonstrate a new and transformed way of life for the world.

The prophet calls upon the mountains, the hills, the whole of creation to hear God's frustration with God's own people. God reminds the creation that it was the God of the universe who rescued God's own people from slavery in Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and saved them when King Balak of Moab sought to destroy them. Then Micah poses the question to the people: "What does God require of you? Does God want your religious rituals? Will God be pleased with your sacrifices of yearling calves and rams and rivers of precious oil, even your firstborn child?"

Micah says God has told you, "O mortal, what is good and what the Lord requires of you — three things: that you do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God."

The late Eugene Peterson, himself a Presbyterian pastor, wrote a paraphrase of these verses. Peterson writes: "God has already made it plain how you are to live, what to do. Do what is fair and just to your neighbor. Be compassionate and loyal in your love. And don't take yourself too seriously. Take God seriously."¹

Micah says you don't have to worry about being good or perfect or smart or rich. Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with God.

Do justice. Several years ago, I was preaching a series of evening services at the Chapel by the Lake Presbyterian Church outside of Juneau, Alaska. Each evening, I asked the pastors if they would invite a person from the congregation to get up and tell how they had seen God at work in their life. On Friday, Bill got up. He was an elder and the founder and owner of a well-known and respected architecture firm that employed over 120 people.

He was well-liked and admired. He had a wonderful wife and two great teenage children. By all appearances, Bill lived a perfect life. Bill stood up in front of the congregation, took a deep breath and then said, "I have seen God at work in my life every day because, as of today, I have been sober for eight years. I am a recovering alcoholic, and it is a battle every day not to take a drink."

When he said this, there was an audible gasp in the congregation. Then Bill looked at his wife Ann and said, "I have seen God at work every day because I am still married to the most wonderful woman in the world. And even in the bad times, Annie, you put up with me. And I love you more now than ever. I see God in you every day."

Then he looked at his two teenage children, Josh and Angie. And Bill said, "And I see God at work every day because I have the two most amazing kids. I know I was a terrible father to you, Josh and Angie. In these past eight years I have tried to make it up to you. I am so proud

of you. And I am so grateful for your loving me. No Dad could ask for two better kids."

Later, I was talking to Bill and thanking him for his courage. He said to me, "It wasn't courage. It was just the right thing to do." That is what it means to do justice: to do the right thing. Gene Peterson says, do what is fair and just to your neighbor. Bill reminds us that we need to do what is fair and just to our family. Do justice.

Love kindness. I was speaking at a weekend youth retreat outside of Portland, Oregon. The presbytery owns Camp Menucha, which sits on a bluff overlooking the Columbia River Gorge. It is a beautiful place. It was a particularly tough weekend for Melissa. Melissa, a freshman in high school, was a paraplegic and confined to a wheelchair. While the camp was a beautiful place, it was not fully accessible for a wheelchair.

Melissa did her best — and everyone helped — but on Saturday, when the rain stopped, and we quickly went outside to a field for some recreation, Melissa could not join us. She had to sleep in the main lodge because the cabins were not accessible. I talked with her several times over the weekend. She was petite and quiet and shy. I told her I admired her courage for coming to the retreat. She told me she really wanted to come and that she was having a good time. She was so gracious and so kind.

That night, we had a dance in the main lodge. Typical of a lot of teenage dances, there were

not really couples dancing. It was more like clusters of friends dancing. Darin was the opposite of Melissa. He was tall, a senior in high school, an athlete, loud, arrogant, bordering on obnoxious. He would make jokes that were not always appropriate. He had already pulled some pranks on some of the younger kids. He was funny and charismatic and good looking, which let him get away with a lot — and he seemed to know it.

We were coming near to the end of the dance, when Darin went to the guy who was choosing the music and told him to stop the music. Then Darin yelled for everyone to get one of the chairs stacked against the walls of the lodge. None of us knew what he was doing, but everyone obeyed. Then he told us to scatter the chairs in the middle of the room. I thought he was going to have us play some kind of game.

Then he signaled the guy to start the music again and told us all to sit down and then yelled at Melissa, who was sitting in her wheelchair on the side of the room, “Melissa! Let’s dance!” Melissa brought herself into the center of the room. Darin took a chair right next to her and nearly 200 youth and adults all sat down — and we danced. Melissa was laughing. Darin was laughing. Just for a moment, I had a glimpse of God’s kingdom come and God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. *Love kindness.*

Walk humbly with God. You know interestingly in the Hebrew, the emphasis here is on the

walk. These are all imperative verbs. *Do. Love. Walk.* The order is intentional. We *do* justice. We *love* kindness. We *walk* humbly with God. I think the order is intentional because when we do what is fair and just, when we love with kindness, then we are walking humbly with God.

In August, after teaching for a week at Yonsei University in Seoul, I stopped for a few days in Osaka, Japan. I had been to Japan a number of times, but never to Osaka. It is a beautiful city with great food. And many of you know that while I am of Japanese ancestry, I am a fourth generation American. It is my great grandparents that emigrated from Japan to the United States. So while I can speak some Japanese, I am really limited. Mostly I can just order food and insult people, which is not great.

But whenever I am in Japan, I like to try out my basic Japanese. And everywhere I went, grocery store or subway or train station, when I would speak what I thought was pretty decent Japanese, people would look at me and then respond in English. I began to get a bit annoyed by this, so on the second to the last day, I went to a Japan rail ticket office to buy a ticket and reserve a seat on the train to Kansai airport. I stood in line and then went up to the woman at the counter and bowed and said, in what I thought was good Japanese, “May I please buy a train ticket for the airport tomorrow. I said, “Ashita no ressha no kippu o katte mo idesu ka?”

She looked at me and smiled and bowed and replied in English, “Of course, I am glad to help you.”

I said to her. “Excuse me. But I thought that was very good Japanese.”

She smiled and said, “Oh yes. Very good Japanese. What time tomorrow?”

And I said, “No, wait. If that was very good Japanese, why did you talk to me in English?”

And she smiled politely and said. “Oh, I am sorry. Accent.”

“I don’t have an accent,” I said to her.

She smiled pleasantly and said, “Yes. Accent. American accent.”

“I have an American accent?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said, smiling, “very bad.”

“You could tell I was an American because of my accent?” I asked her.

“Yes,” she said. “Also,” she continued, “walk.”

“You could tell I was an American because of how I walk?” I asked incredulously.

“Yes,” she said. “you have American walk. Not Japanese walk. Easy to tell.”

“I walk American?” I said.

See, that’s why the verbs are all imperatives. What does the Lord require of us? *Do* justice. *Love* kindness. *Walk* humbly. What if the way we walked showed how much we love Jesus Christ? I think God ordered these three requirements because when we do what is just, do what is right and when we love kindness, then it will show in our walk. Then we will

be walking humbly with God because we are doing what is right and being loving and kind to all.

Bill walks that walk every day as a recovering alcoholic, as a husband, as a father. Melissa walks that walk every day in her wheelchair and by having the courage to come to a weekend retreat in a place she knew was not going to be friendly to her body. Darin, loud, funny, arrogant, borderline obnoxious, walks that walk by teaching us all to dance in a whole new way.

God is not impressed with our rituals, with trying to appear perfect and having it all together. God requires three things: Do justice. Love kindness. And to walk!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

¹Eugene Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2003

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.