

Micah 6:1-8

“Justice in the Name of God for our community”

As Christians and as United Methodists, we are a people that don't stand for the status quo. We have been a people that have called for great change in the world. We have been a people that have called for justice for the oppressed. We have been a people that seek justice so that all people can experience the new life in Jesus Christ.

Earlier I gave you my report on Annual Conference. Part of the discussion of Annual Conference petitions center on our social justice theme as Methodists. Yet sometime we don't know exactly what it means to have a social justice stand as Christians or in our case, as United Methodists. I felt that at Annual Conference even some us as delegates, as pastors, and as guests we have very different views of what means to have a social justice stance.

Some folks have tried to state that our social justice witness is just a political ploy or even an act of communism. I'm going to tell you right now that really isn't the case from a historical Methodist perspective on social justice. I believe that if we are going to be a community of Faith, and I'm speaking directly as Faith Church, we need to understand what it means to have a social justice stance. Social justice is bringing about the Kingdom that Jesus spoke of on this earth. I believe that our social justice stance needs to be grounded in God's Word first and foremost, it needs to represent the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and it needs to be meaningful to the people who work for justice and for the people who are recipients of God's justice.

As a part of our series on the Minor Prophets that I am leading us through this summer we come across the book of Micah. Now Micah is very much a prophet's prophet. He is that because he did things that prophets did, such as proclaiming truth to a people that didn't want to hear, and he never left anyone alone in his prophecies.

Micah was a contemporary of the better well known prophet Isaiah. He was from outside of the urban environment, being raised in a small town about 20 miles from Jerusalem. He didn't have a fixation on the king of Judah as some great figure that was worthy of awe and wonder. Instead, he had little patience for the mess that urban folk would often get themselves into and really didn't care much for a monarchy at all. Micah was focused on being a voice for God.

Micah's prophecy and message focused quite a bit on the idolatry that had come about in Jerusalem and he had criticism for what was going on in the Temple. Micah's message is urging people to return back to God and get away from the man-made destructive behaviors that they had fallen into.

Micah is often quoted and used as an example of a prophet who cared much for social justice. Now Micah wouldn't have had the same idea of social justice that we have today, for much of our understanding of social justice is a fairly recent innovation in our culture. Yet he did speak out against doing things that glorified man alone, rather than showing God the glory that God deserves. Here the emphasis of who the work is done for is on God, not man.

The passage that I would like to draw your attention to is specifically verse 8 of chapter 6. The passage reads "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?" There is a lot present in this passage and especially in the context that I mentioned previously.

I believe that as a church we should take this passage to heart. In much of my studies on our vision process and in other church study materials, a key component of a vital congregation is that the congregation has a missional focus. Now that missional focus can manifest itself in various ways, but one of those ways is an active witness for justice in the community. Rather

than being focused on the issues of man, we need to be focused on the issues that God cares about and work towards bringing about justice to those who are in need of God's care.

Now if we go looking for issues that God needs to have addressed, we don't have to look far. Issues of justice can be seen in various ways in our community. In my research in the Cheyenne community I can identify a few issues. In our community we have many people that go hungry and children that don't have the proper food and clothing so that they can be good students in school. We have immigrants in the community who have difficulty in making a living for them or their families. We have a high amount of sexually transmitted diseases in our county. Methamphetamine use is high in our county as well. There is a large amount of the population that does not attend church or have a church home at all. These are all issues of justice in our community.

So you can see that issues of justice don't have to be far away in different countries or in different parts of our country. We just have to look outside the door and there we have issues that we need to confront as a church community. The Word of God has much that can be applied to our community and the community needs to hear a witness of God's word so that we can work towards improving our community. It's taking the focus off of us and focusing on the needs of our neighbors.

Now, what it looks like to address these issues of social justice in our community, I'm not really sure how that looks in fine detail. That is something that we would need to work on together and do lots of praying. It may seem that these challenges may seem unsurmountable or that we may not be able to have much of an impact, but remember that we are a people that have seen everything go down the tubes, and have witnessed the overcoming the greatest challenge, the challenger of overcoming death. In our faith we have a Savior that rose up from the grave

and it is in the spirit of our Savior Jesus Christ that we can be a force for good in our community. Even if we only help one person, we have done great things for God.

The Gospels give us good clues on what it means as well to care for those who have been cast aside by the greater society. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a classic example of someone stepping out of their way to care for another human being. In the story of the Good Samaritan we have an individual who was travelling and was attacked by robbers and was left for dead. One of the powers of the day in Christ's time was the priestly class, the class that lead the religious life of their day. The priest walks by the nearly dead man and leaves him alone, not caring for him at all. How often has the powers of our society ignored those at the bottom of our society? How many times as we as a church ignored those who were at the bottom of society who are in need of our voice to ease their suffering?

Later on a Levite passes by the same man, and like the priest ignores the man. The Levite would have been a part of a class of elites. Levites had a high status in the society of Christ's time. A Levite would have had the means to help out a man who was suffering. Yet this Levite passes on down the road. How many times have those with means passed by those who were suffering? How many times have those with the power to help those who have no voice sat idly by while people have suffered?

The twist in the story of the Good Samaritan is when a person who would have had little, the Samaritan man himself, stopped to tend for the man who was nearly dead. Samaritans themselves were of a lower class of people. They were only half a person compared to the typical person of their society. They were considered to be people who would have cared little for anyone else. Yet this Samaritan man who passes by the nearly dead man is moved to care for him. The Samaritan man takes the time to care for the man and takes him to a place where he can

heal. The Samaritan man even leaves funds behind so the innkeeper can care for the traveler after the Samaritan has left. How many times have we witnessed in our lives generosity and care coming from those who we least expected it? How many times have we witnessed justice carried out by those who would seem to have little?

Christ tells this story so that we can be empowered to act and to care for those who need a voice. This is my foundation for social justice. Acting as Christ calls us to act so that the world may know the new life in Christ Jesus. My motivation to care of other people is not driven by the desires of man but by the love of Christ for my neighbor. Social justice needs to be focused on the message of Jesus Christ and the prophets of old. Christ has spoken about the need to care for those who are in need of help. Micah instructed the people of his day to care for those who are in need of care and not to be focused on the ways of the world.

I believe that we can capture this spirit of caring for the world at Faith Church. By becoming a church that reaches out to the community and cares for the least we will be blessed greatly by the love of God in our actions. As we show love for our neighbor so shall we experience the love of Christ. It's not about numbers or how great our work is, but it is about the heart of our care.

Today as we depart in the world, it is my challenge to you to do what Micah calls us to do and seek out justice for those in need of care. It is my challenge to you to show the love of Jesus Christ to those in need of our care. We are a people that have been blessed with much, and it is our duty to share our blessings with others, so that all may live in the new life in Christ Jesus. Amen.