

February 2, 2020

'That Kind of Silence'
(Micah 6:1-8)

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It is NOT the kind of silence that sweeps across a congregation
Or any community gathered for worship: when they feel in their gut....
they just KNOW that somehow they have been touched and
bound together by the Spirit of God.

It is NOT the kind of hush that falls across a group of campers at Moon Beach
when they're standing by the lake during evening vespers, looking at the sky
blazing with pinks and oranges, as they watch the sun drop beneath the pine
trees.

And it's NOT the kind of silence that we experience after a long snowfall...
more than a foot of snow on the ground and the world isif only for a few hours,
profoundly quiet.

These kinds of silence are born from knowing BEAUTY, GOD'S SPIRIT, GOODNESS,
TRUTH AND PEACE.

The kind of silence we experience when we read Micah 6 – is NOT that kind of
silence. It's the kind of silence we feel in a courtroom, a silence born from the
world having gone wrong. It's the kind of silence that comes from a world
that knows PAIN & SADNESS, ANGER & DESPAIR, GUILT AND CONFESSION.

If you've had the experience of being present in a courtroom, you may have felt
this kind of silence. If not, imagine the scene:

As the black robed judge enters the courtroom, all present are commanded to
stand. She takes her place on the bench and all present may be seated.
Except for the defendant, who rises, feeling, I am sure, as if the whole world is
looking at him – the eyes of the whole world are PIERCING his back.
He is called into accountability for something he has done. For now, he stands
there alone. IN SILENCE.

In Micah, it is the entire community of Israel who in standing there in the silent courtroom. Today, it is each one of us, the congregation of this church, the community of Eagle River and further, our nation, standing in the SILENT courtroom. God brings the accusation. IT IS GOD WHO HAS BEEN HURT, and a rush of passionate words come from the mouth of God:

*What did I do to you - that you would do this to me?

*Don't you remember that I traveled with you?

*I walked with you from Egypt through the Red Sea,
through the wilderness to the Land of Promise?

*Don't you remember how I have always nestled you in the palm of my hand?

*And how it was ME, ME who led you through the sand & waters so safely?

I LOVED YOU. I walked with you so that you would know what kind of God I am – So that you would be saved! Can't you feel the tears in the eyes of God? The people have now chosen NOT to walk with God, not to love the God who had saved them. Now, God's speech comes to an end, and there IS THAT KIND OF SILENCE...an eerie kind of silence.

The people stand there, nervously shuffling their feet. THEY KNOW IT'S TRUE. They KNOW they have done it again. They have stood in this same courtroom before! How could they have forgotten the pain of God? And they're wondering, "When did we turn away?" They (and we) stand there in that eerie silence.

And finally, one of them cries out, "What do you want from me? What can I do? If I came and bowed before you, would that be enough? Should I bring an offering to you? I would do that! I'll bring the right gift, not just an ordinary gift! I will bring a wonderful gift. A greater gift than any other: thousands of rams into the temple, thousand of rivers of oil! No one has ever brought a gift that large!" NOT ENOUGH?! I will give you my child. What more do you want from me?

This frantic, desperate outburst is answered by Micah, who is standing nearby. Micah puts his arm on the shoulder of the one who has spoken with such frustration to God. Micah says to him quietly: "You already know. God wants you to walk with God, love like God, and do justice."

But I wonder if that one who cried out felt any relief at all at Micah's words. Now, he knew EXACTLY what God wanted. No more making wild and rash and lavish promises. No more making useless trips to the altar with gifts meant to please God...but which only offended God. [what kind of gifts do we bring?!] No more spending time and energy finding the biggest and the best. NO MORE! Just walk. Love. Do Justice.

Maybe he wasn't relieved at all, but instead confused. Very Confused. After all, what does it mean to do justice?! And his confusion would have to be ours also – If the Prophet Micah had not left us a little clue! At first it seems hidden from us, But there is a little clue, a little secret...in the middle of God's speech to the people in the courtroom. Sometimes, people read this story, and they don't even know it's there!

God is there in that courtroom, naming all the wonderful things God has done for the people. REMEMBER THOSE WORDS GOD SPOKE? (*Listen carefully!*) "I walked with you from Egypt. I kept you safe. I gave Moses to lead you." And God said, "I gave you Aaron." The people in the courtroom would have nodded their heads. YES, Aaron had been support for Moses through that wilderness.

"And," God said, "I have you MIRIAM." At this, the people would NOT immediately nod their heads. At this, the people of God would be PUZZLED.

MIRIAM?!

*Miriam, the sister who stood by and watched the baby Moses lay dangerously vulnerable in the basket in the river?

*Miriam, who would, after the crossing of the Red Sea, tambourine in hand, dance and sing a song of victory?

*The Miriam who dared to speak out against her brother Moses?

*Miriam, who had dared to ask the question:

"Couldn't SHE, along with her brother, be a spokesperson for God?"

*The Miriam who was then stricken with leprosy, and sent for 7 days to stand outside the camp to bear her shame?

"YES!!!" God says, "MIRIAM! I sent you Moses & Aaron & Miriam!"

In that one simple sentence, Miriam's gifts, that had been ignored, silenced, even punished are now acknowledged by God.

Now, centuries later, Miriam is remembered as a gift to the people of God.

God was doing justice! The kind of justice that will prevail on this earth-
When everyone of every gender, race, age, gender orientation, ethnic
background, faith, social and economic status and place – every good person will
be RECOGNIZED as good and valuable and gifted in the eyes of God.

That kind of justice, Micah is saying, THAT is what God wants! Do justice.

It's as if God is saying to us, "The next time that Mother's Day rolls around,
Don't go and buy me expensive presents and grand gifts. Don't send me a
present wrapped up with gold, shiny ribbons. Don't send me dozens of roses.
DON'T. Just sit down with me at the table, SHARE A MEAL. Invite my children.
All of your brothers and sisters. Invite them to eat with us.
That is all I want from you. *[Who do WE leave out?]*

And when that happens, there will be a silence in this world – A GREAT SILENCE.
A silence that comes from the beauty that God's world is as it should be.
THAT KIND OF SILENCE. May it be so. Amen.