

Words Forming Witnesses

Psalm 146 & Hosea 6:8
(Hymns – 692, 694, 760, 740)
June 9, 2013

What Is Good?

Micah prophesied in a time of self-serving rulers,
corrupt courts, hypocritical religious leaders,
callous business leaders, and idolatrous people.

Micah hit four themes over and over again
as he courageously spoke the Word of the Lord
into the midst of this culture:

- 1) the consequences of these attitudes and behaviours is collapse;
- 2) God is like a faithful shepherd – gathering, guiding, protecting, and nourishing;
- 3) God is faithful, compassionate, and merciful; and
- 4) following God leads to compassionate social engagement.

As a result of the self-destructive attitudes and behaviours
Micah exposed in his ministry,
the Southern Kingdom of Judah was conquered and exiled
by the Assyrians in 722/721.

The most well-known passage from the entire book of Micah
Is the one we memorized this week and read this morning:

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, love kindness,
and walk humbly with your God?*

Throughout the week, as I was memorizing afresh
and pondering this text,
I kept thinking of the ways in which
we are practicing and nurturing these kinds of spiritual practices
here at Brentwood.

We're not a large congregation,
with lots of programs and things going on.
We gather on Sunday morning for worship, learning, and fellowship.
We go out into our distinct and diverse lives to serve during the week.
We get together Friday evenings for Bible Study and Youth Group.
Once a month we celebrate Jazz Vespers and have a Gospel Nights Concert.

It's a pretty basic rhythm.
It's a pretty simple way of being a Christian community.
And it's working pretty well –
new people are becoming part of this Christian community,
we are generating enough revenues to sustain the mission,
we enjoy each other's company,
we are nourishing souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ,
people are getting their lives centred in Jesus Christ,
they are enjoying community with Jesus Christ,
and they are experiencing the compassion of Jesus Christ.

I'm confident the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit –
as they dance around in delight in the eternal dimension of life
look on us and say, "That's good!"
"That's what we wanted to say through Micah!"
And, they quietly but persistently encourage us, "It can be better!"

So, let's take a closer look at what Micah's words might mean for us
in our time and place.
What attitudes and behaviours, what practices,
are appropriate responses of gratitude
for the grace God has shown in Jesus Christ
and makes so powerfully alive among us through the work of the Holy Spirit?

Because this is really the whole point of Micah,
and all the other prophets.
Indeed, it's the whole point
of the whole Bible,
with its rich, diverse testimonies
to the faithfulness, compassion, and mercy of God.

That point is this – forming us to be God's friends.
That point is this – nourishing us to live with the dignity and worth God intends.
That point is this – living so others are drawn into this kind of flourishing future.

I wonder, sometimes, whether we take what we doing here at Brentwood
too much for granted.
It becomes a habit we don't really think about.
It becomes something we have to do rather than get to do.
It becomes too familiar, too routine, too ordinary.

What we see in the prophets,
what we see in the life of Jesus,
what we should be offering in this congregation,
is a message from God that breaks into and disrupts
all of that familiarity, routine, and ordinary activity.

The prophets and Jesus threw disruptive dissonance into their societies.

You're acting like this, they pointed out,
while the God of Abraham and Sarah and their successors
blessed us so we can act differently,
so we can act with justice, kindness, and intimacy with God.
It's significant that the recording of Micah's prophecies
ends with the assurance that God will be loyal to Abraham,
that God will continue to offer the unconditional covenant –
I will bless you so you can bless others.

Let's get back to our key questions for this morning –
what attitudes and behaviours, what practices
are appropriate responses of gratitude
for the grace God has shown in Jesus Christ
and makes so powerfully alive among us through the work of the Holy Spirit?

We're doing them all here at Brentwood,
in our own humble way.

They are embedded in our invitation
printed every Sunday on the front of the bulletin.
Perhaps we should begin to prayerfully read that invitation
every Sunday as we settle into our pew,
before we begin to catch up with our friends in Christ
gathered here to be nourished.

The more we remind ourselves of this invitation –
an invitation from God, really, not just from us -
the more we will consciously and conscientiously practice it.

Here's one way of seeing what we are doing here at Brentwood
in the light of Micah's summary of what is good.

We walk humbly with our God in worship, learning, fellowship, and service.

We come into God's presence in a special way
during our worship services.

There's an order to what we do,
an order we follow every week.

Let me walk you through it explicitly.

We warm up by singing some of the old favourites.
We welcome each other and share the Peace of Christ.
We light the Christ candle to remind us of his presence
at the centre of our gathering
and sing our joy at being here with him.

We are called to worship,
sing in delight at being able to come to worship,
acknowledge our aspirations and failures as we approach God,
and hear afresh God's merciful welcome and assurance of pardon.

Then we listen for God's word.
It comes in different forms and patterns –
in song, in responsive readings,
in listening to the Bible read and interpreted,
and in beautiful jazz.
Our instincts, emotions, and intellect are all touched
by the Holy Spirit as we encounter afresh
the God who came in Jesus Christ
and remains in our midst through the work of the Holy Spirit.
This is the God of Abraham,
through whom the curse on Adam was reversed.

In our response to this divine word, then,
We sing some more,
talk about the work and witness of our church,
and pray that we may participate in God's grace and compassion.

We then are reminded that we go forth with God's blessing,
to love and serve the Lord.
All the worship, learning, and fellowship we enjoyed
flows into the service that will evident in our lives during the week.
The commission captures some of the key messages of our worship
and we are sent out with an assurance of God's faithful presence.
Again, we sing –
a confident prayer that reminds us yet again of Christ's companionship.

To engage in these practices week after week,
to live this life of Christian discipline,
is good.

This is the kind of goodness Micah knew
to be at the heart of humble walk with God.

And that humble walk is what it means to flourish.