

Micah 6: 1-8
Epiphany 4A
January 29, 2017
Lincoln Street UMC

I call it Trump-lash. That feeling you get when you dare to turn on the news and you hear of yet another outrageous comment our President has made or terrifying appointment or horrible executive order. Every day, and some days it feels like every hour, there is a new horrifying report coming out of our nation's capitol.

A report that steps up our heartbeat, raises our blood pressure, and creates pinpoints of pressure behind the eyes.

And we think, when we hear the latest, I have to do something. I have to respond. I have to make my disagreement known and why. This is where I have to put my energy. *This* will be my priority.

And then the next news cycle comes along and throws us into another tailspin and off we go chasing another problem, strategizing on our response to another crippling move by the executive office.

And that, my friends, that's when we've been Trump-lashed.

Fear permeates the news. Everything is urgent. And we are tossed and turned on the sea of news chaos.

It feels awful. And it threatens to overwhelm us to the point that we are immobilized.

Every once in a while, we are thrown a bone like last weekend when the news was about *us* about our marches, our stands, all across the globe. Our protest against the political practices and the outrageous rhetoric of our newly installed leader.

So every once in a while, we have a moment to catch our collective breath and get replenished by a news cycle that speaks clearly what we need to hear, and what we know to be true. We've dropped anchor in a safe inlet and the waters have calmed.

[pause] and then it all starts to roll back in. The cyclone of offense, ignorance and bigotry.

And our craft which we had hoped was safely at anchor, gets swept up in the tidal forces and back out into a rocky sea.

It is just simply a difficult time in the history of our nation to know how to acquire information. It is a difficult time to remember the basics, on what we want to focus, when story after story after story pulls us this way and that.

It is just a difficult time. It's exhausting and confusing and takes every atom of intelligence we have to keep the chaos from overtaking our logic, our vision, our priorities.

And so it was for the Hebrew people.

The twelve Hebrew tribes who crossed the Jordan River together and settled in the land we now call Israel, they understood that they had been given the land as a gift.

They had fled slavery in Egypt, gotten endlessly lost in the wilderness, and began to wonder if perhaps they should go back to what they knew, when at last, 40 years later, they found a new home to settle.

But they were given this land with a few proviso's. In Biblical speak, it was given within a covenant from God. They were to do what God asked of them as a sign of their gratitude for this new home. God instructed them to honor elders, protect the orphaned and widowed, share their resources equitably, and practice prayer and piety together. Their mandate was clear. Their priorities and values were set.

Fast forward hundreds of years to the late 700's B.C.E. The people lately have been struggling.

Foreign powers have toppled Northern Israel, leveling cities and demolishing livelihoods.

Folks in the southern region are sweating. They see their number coming up. And rather than risk a military encounter with the Assyrians, instead the leadership forges a deal. They'll send crops, pay taxes, whatever it takes to keep the army from their gates.

But the problem with that is that when one makes a deal with the devil, there's no turning back. And a slow crumbling of the nation's values and priorities ensue. Because who winds up paying these taxes? Who is it that carries the majority of the burden of this so-called saving arrangement?

You guessed it, the poor and marginalized. The wealthy elite have forgotten their obligations to the disadvantaged. And as a consequence, they have turned from their covenantal obligations with God.

Into this chaos, speaks Micah. Messages of fear and war surround the people. They are anxious, stressed, and looking over their shoulder - convinced that the other shoe is going to drop any day and the Assyrians will invade anyway, despite what Israel has sacrificed to them.

Into this chaos, Micah heralds another message. Waving his arms, carrying placards, chanting slogans, Micah pierces through the noise of the era and tells the people, “You think you have problems with the Assyrians. That’s nothing compared to the issue God has with you. God, who has been ever faithful and present in your time of need, God is bringing you up on charges.

“You have sacrificed what is most essential in order to contend with your fear. You, Israelites, you have handed over your weakest and most vulnerable in the name of peace and protection.

And Israel responds defensively, petulantly, “Okay, now so what do *you* need? What *other* sacrifices do we need to make to keep *you* from our gates as well?

Thousands of rams? Will that make you happy? *Tens of thousands* of rivers of oil? Our firstborn children? Tell us, Mighty Yahweh, tell us what we need to add to the list of what we're handing over.

And echoing through the ages in this well-preserved and cherished verse, you can hear God’s deep breath, God’s calm and patient parental presence.

“No my beloved, I want no alms. No *thing* can fix this. In order to repair this relationship, we need to return to the original covenant, your first mandate, the *only* message that matters.

Do justice. Don’t wish for it. Make it happen. See your own role in it all, protecting the most vulnerable.

Love kindness. Remember loyalty, faithfulness. Build your life and relationships on fidelity and integrity.

And walk humbly with God. Walk carefully, intentionally, circumspectly - in partnership with the One who loves you to the ends of the earth and the end of time.

That is what needs to be at the center of all decisions, all choices, all efforts, all priorities, all values, all relationships.

When we are feeling Trump-lashed, let us return to the heart of our faith. For in this verse is indeed where lies the heart, the passion, the meaning of everything else we do.

When we are ready to topple over with one more what - one more outrageous *thing* that our nation's leader has promulgated upon us, let us focus on the how and the why. They were offered as gift to the Hebrew nation and are gift to us now - from a God who loves each of us to the ends of the earth and the end of time.

Let these words be gift to us, a compass in our way ahead.

Do justice

Love mercy

Walk intentionally with God.

Amen.