

The Joy of Giving!

[Text - Micah 6:1-8]

Pastor Dave Shackle
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One of the great things I've discovered as a grandfather, is the renewed joy of *gift-giving*. I don't mean the stereotypical "spoiling" of the grandkids [though that is fun!]; or the payback of buying a drum-and-cymbal set for the child of *your* child, who was quite the little noisemaker herself [though that can be deviously satisfying]. I'm referring to the pleasure of once again finding toys and other fun and personalized gifts, after that long span when gift-cards or cash became the preferred option for those hard-to-shop-for teens or adult children. Yet as enjoyable as it is to take that nostalgic trip through the toy section of Target, an even greater joy is when your grandchildren reach the stage where they want to make or pick-out their own special gift for you. When those little ones make the cognitive and emotional connection between *giving* and *joy*, that *joy* is highly contagious! When you see that radiant, excited look on the face of little children who are beginning to understand that being thoughtful and giving is truly a gift unto itself, it fills your heart with tremendous joy!

In today's Old Testament reading, the prophet Micah muses about what wonderful gift the Children of Israel might present to the Holy One: "With what shall I come before the Sovereign One, and bow myself before God on high?" Micah begins his musings with an imaginative courtroom scene, where the Sovereign One calls upon the ageless mountains and hills to hear God's complaint against God's people. The Holy One asks, "My people, what have I done to you? In what ways have I wearied you?" Apparently, at this stage in their history, the Children of Israel are behaving like a bunch of spoiled brats; and the Holy One simply can't understand it. They seem to have forgotten all the wonderful ways in which the Holy One responded to their cries for help, when they were down-and-out; because now they are treating the poor and vulnerable among them similarly to how they themselves had been treated by their past oppressors.

So, through the prophet Micah, the Holy One reminds the Israelites “It was *I* who brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; I sent you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam!” Like a loving parent, the Holy One has shown them kindness, generosity, and compassion; with the expectation being that they do the same for others. The Holy One doesn’t care about their burnt offerings; the Righteous One isn’t interested or swayed by their oblations of oil or their numerous animal sacrifices. In fact, there’s only one gift that the Holy One truly desires from those who seek to serve and follow: “God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Holy One require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God!”

“*DO* Justice!” That elementary concept is easy enough to grasp; yet putting it into *practice* is a whole other matter. Even a child understands the basic idea of what it means to “Do justice.” It means that we treat other people with fairness and kindness, just like we want to be treated. What prevents this from happening, isn’t necessarily that we set-out to treat others unjustly; it’s that our own selfishness gets in the way.

We live in a world where one-third of the population goes hungry, while another third goes on a diet! Where’s the fairness in that? We live in a country where corporations and CEO’s continue to rake in obscenely large profits and salaries, while their companies freeze wages, lay off workers and cut their benefits. How is that at all just, or justifiable? Perhaps a solution to much of the world’s injustice involves the second step of Micah’s message: “Do justice, and *love kindness!*”

“*LOVE* Kindness!” Become enamored with and enthusiastic about the fundamental concept of being kind! When you see someone who is struggling or in need, take the time - make the effort - to reach-out and help them. Fall in love with the idea of routinely performing those “random acts of kindness” that open-up before you every day. You’ll not only help others feel better about themselves, you’ll also feel pretty positive about yourself. And you’ll also find that you are on the path to

fulfilling that third part of Micah's mantra: "Do justice, love kindness, and *walk humbly with your God.*"

Walking humbly with God, means acknowledging that we have not yet "arrived" - that we are still on the journey, with places to go, people to interact with, and things to discover and accomplish. And the more you and I walk step-by-step with the Divine Source of Life, the more we realize that we are created to reflect the Image of our Loving Source. Now maybe that doesn't sound particularly *humble*, but it really is; because it's not about what we accomplish, it's about what *God* has done and continues to do for us all. It doesn't mean that we are greater or lesser than anyone else; it simply means that we appreciate our place and purpose in this world, with and among the rest of Creation. Walking humbly with God also means that you and I can exemplify a Divine Presence *wherever* we go!

Walking in harmony with our Divine Source inspires us to do some truly courageous things:

To show genuine compassion to all we meet.

To respect others for who they are - sisters and brothers also created in the Divine Image.

To appreciate our similarities, and our marvelous differences.

And most importantly, to recognize that the Love of the Holy One is infinitely capable of embracing us all - that there is no shortage of Divine justice, kindness, or compassion! Therefore, we can freely offer these things to family and friends, neighbors and strangers - trusting that there is a Sacred Presence and Potential in each and every encounter.

The Prophet Micah muses, "With what shall I come before the Sovereign One, and bow myself before God on high?" That's an excellent question for you and me to also ponder. What good and pleasing gift might we offer the Holy One today? Of course, we already know the answer: 'You know, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Holy One require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God!' Get that right, and everything else falls into place.