

As we gathered for worship on Wednesday evening, I was extremely nervous—not to see what kind of pjs and comfy clothes people rolled in wearing, I mean I was in Highland cow Christmas pants—but because we were going to dare to go down a road of conversation that I wasn’t sure where it would take us. I think we all know, have felt, that the world has been unbelievably heavy, and it kept circling my mind and heart that if we can’t talk about these things and how they make us feel in church then where can we talk about them. So we worshipped and we opened the floor, to lament, to hope, to give voice to the things that were resting, weighing on our hearts and minds. There were tears, there was laughter, and there was this phrase, “When tragedy becomes synonymous with Tuesday.” It was one of the most profound things I had ever heard, because it felt so true.

A quote was going around clergy pages this week that said something along the lines of, “The problem with having your sermon done on Wednesday is that...*stuff*...keeps happening.” And it’s true. Both of those sentiments are true. In the world we are living in, tragedy has become synonymous with any day ending in Y and things just keep happening, and the result can be...so many things. Heartbreak, anger that borders on rage, and honestly, desensitization, complete disconnect, because when things keep happening, how can you keep caring so much? How can you give of

yourself enough to address all the things and suddenly you feel helpless and hopeless and like there's no point in trying because well, tomorrow is just going to end in Y too, so let's just wait for the next thing.

Honestly, the lectionary this week is almost...laughable...like I read the lessons, particularly the first lesson, and called Jennifer and was just like you cannot make this stuff up. You sit down and think I wonder what I'm going to preach about this week and then you see...“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?” and you just want to hang your head and be like come on! Couldn't it be something sweet and loveable? Couldn't it be something easy? But then comes the reality...the gospel, our life with God, walking a path of faith is rarely easy...and so here we are...

Micah is faced with a near impossible task, not unusual for a prophet if we're honest. He is called to speak to God's people in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Now this is long after the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, but also long before the Babylonian Exile. God's people are divided between two kingdoms, each trying desperately to figure out life with a never-ending carousel of worthless kings, all while constantly being assailed by foreign powers who want nothing more than to overtake them. And if all of that wasn't enough, the world inside their country isn't any

better. There is extreme economic disparity, with the poor being oppressed and victimized, massive political instability, see the aforementioned kingly carousel, and sharp religious decline. Here we have God's people living near Jerusalem, God's center, God's house, and yet they could not be further away from God. Thus enters Micah and his impossible task, to take God's people to court—metaphorically at least.

Our first lesson is a courtroom drama. God has sent Micah as God's prosecuting attorney to lay before God's people their offenses. Micah tells them that all of creation is prepared to hear their defense, to hear their explanation for why their relationship with God has deteriorated. This isn't just a matter between God and the people, this is a matter between all of creation. Micah demands that the people *remember* what God has done for them and not just for the sake of remembering, but to try and combat the social and political forces that benefit from forgetting their collective past. If you can erase from the people's memory God's liberating acts from oppression in their past, you can convince them that their current oppression isn't so bad. If God's people forget they once rose up in Egypt, then they will see no reason to resist no and thus the cycles of oppression can continue. Micah wants the people to remember who they are. They are a

people rooted and grounded in liberation, in resistance, in a call to free the bonds of slavery and harm and live in freedom and community.

And then we find out another piece of the puzzle and thus problem. The people have decided that offerings are enough, that rote worship is enough, that they simply have to check the boxes of what they claim God expects and all shall be well. They proclaim that it is enough to bow down before God and worship. That is their defense and God...well, God is less than impressed. Micah tells the people what deep down they already know, who they are: people of liberation and freedom, a people called not to trite repetition of the right words, but called to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. *That* is what relationship with God and each other looks like, not this tossing down of offerings and saying good enough with a few words of prayer thrown in for good measure.

I fear that the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the church in America is in desperate need of a Micah moment, because we have fallen into the trap of what is right is what is rote, what is true is what is traditional and what is sacred is what is safe. I have seen so many things over the last few weeks about how Jesus wasn't political, that the church doesn't have a space to speak in relation to what has been going on, but y'all, Jesus was executed as a political criminal and the last time I checked, flipping over tables in the

Temple wasn't exactly a tame act of societal chill. Our heritage, our past, what we are called to remember, yes, is a Jesus who spoke words of love and grace, but also a Jesus who went toe to toe with Herod and Rome and dared to speak out when he saw something that was not godly, that was not sacred, that was desperately trying to turn the profane into something holy. If we as a church, writ large, are not going to use our voices to speak out against injustice, to stand up for those being harmed, to declare that all of God's children are God's children regardless of documentation status, to lament death and murder and violence, then I don't know what we think our calling is, because it isn't simply thoughts and prayers, it isn't just standing up and sitting down when we need to, singing hymns that cry out for peace but ignore the words, passively say thanks be to God for the word of life and then fail to live it out.

People of God, what is God asking of us. To do justice, biblical justice which is aligned with the widow, the orphan, and the alien. Biblical justice that has nothing to do with jail cells and weapons of violence, but that brings all of God's people into right relationship with each other. Justice that knows no bounds when it comes to equity and humane treatment of our siblings. To love kindness, kindness that is not just putting on a false façade of nice, but is doing the genuine work of being kind which sometimes

involves speaking hard truths and saying what needs to be said so that we all can be freed from the shackles of silence. To walk humbly with our God, to not think that we are God and thus able to pass judgment on our fellow siblings, but to walk alongside our God who declares that we are forgiven, saved, beloved even when we are flawed and at our worst. Tragedy might be synonymous with Tuesday, but our God is synonymous with hope and our calling is synonymous with walking the path of righteousness, empathy, and a burning desire to keep showing up. I know it's exhausting and heart-wearying, but people of God, Jesus did not say blessed are those who sit on the sidelines, blessed are those that ignore their siblings pain, blessed are those that choose safety over action. Blessed are the pure of heart, the doers of justice. Blessed are the peacemakers, those who condemn violence. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, not just for themselves but for their siblings. Blessed are those who mourn for ones you didn't even know. Blessed are those who hear, do, and make justice a day that ends in Y. **AMEN!!!**