

January 29, 2023

Micah 6:1-8

“What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

In this verse, the prophet Micah from the 8th century BC, hit the nail on the head as to what God asks of his people. Micah lived in turbulent times. Although his town of Moresheth-Gath was outside the center of the Assyrian empire's rule, those people felt the threat looming over them. The people knew fear, they knew pain and they knew poverty. Micah addressed both the problem - that people had turned away from God - and the solution - he directed them back towards God. He was encouraging them to head in a new direction, towards their deepest longing.

Like those people, we also live in times of governmental uncertainty. We also know fear, we know pain and we see poverty all around us. We too, need to heed Micah's words to do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with our God.

Micah is delivering an alternative message, that there is a different way to live, by walking with our God. I believe that that phrase, 'walk humbly with our God' is the key not only to this verse, but to the intent of the whole Old Testament and the message that Jesus, much later, lives out in his life.

In our lives, we are pulled back and forth by many different forces. We were born into a culture that teaches us that we are valued because of what we do and what we accomplish. These messages can be blatant or subliminal, yet they are constant. And hard to escape.

Yet, our deepest, most essential desires are written in our DNA. We long for them and they are always with us. They are hard to understand, and even harder to put into words. Generally, what we want is to love and be loved, to do what is good and be valued for it and to be a part of something bigger than ourselves! *If* we are able to step back and see clearly, it is a longing for God, who can do all these things in us and through us. Indeed, we are an expression of God in this time and in this place.

Micah comes right out and tells us to walk humbly with our God. Now walking implies some sort of action. Humbly implies that we let go of our own ideas to work with God where God is at work. We must grab onto the hand of God and travel to the limits of our longing.

The limits of our longing.

That's a pretty good phrase, it could be the title of a country western song. But how in the world do we journey to the limits of our longing? I find that a key to anything we want to deal with is awareness. Things that are not in our vision, do not change. So first we must try to visualize our longing. We must get in contact with the very depths of our souls.

We often discount the role of imagination. However, imagination is right up there in the same category as dreams, visions and listening to angels. All Biblical. It's a technique often used in contemplation and spiritual direction. Who do you think gave you your imagination

anyway? Imagination brings things from deep in your heart, up to a level where they can be recognized.

Here's one I do. I imagine myself walking onto the grounds of an ancient monastery. Some of the rock walls have fallen into piles. They are smooth and cool to the touch, and when you reach out and touch them, you can hear the echoes of those who have walked before you. The air is hauntingly still. I play music in the background, which somehow helps me focus. The rhythms of 'Lost temple and ancient cathedral music' on You Tube pulls me into that scene. I walk slowly towards God, edging deeper into my soul, towards the limits of my longing, not knowing what I will find.

Or imagine being held in God's strong arms. I have days when I can't figure out what has gotten into my behavior or what my purpose is. You probably do too. On those days when you're just feeling down, God's warmth and strength will flow into you as you are held in the arms of God.

Or maybe, best yet, stretch out your hand, and grab onto the hand of God, which is yearning to hold yours. Let God guide you thru the minutes and hours of the day. Notice the scents, the lights, the feel of the wind as you walk with God. How does it feel to absorb God's energy, to draw from that source of strength and power?

Know, however, that no technique will take you to God. They can show you the way. They might take you closer. But in the end, you simply have to reach out and take God's hand, which is reaching toward you and step into your deepest longing.

And these are the words we dimly hear:

. . . Go to the limits of your longing. Embody me. Give me your hand. (1) And that is what the Lord requires of you. Amen

(1) Rainer Maria Rilke from Rilke's Book of Hours p. 88