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Mukilteo Presbyterian Church

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“The Right Stuff”

Micah 6:1-8

The prophet Micah asks a profound question one that can rustle in our hearts at almost any moment in life, and it is this: ***What does the Lord require of me? If I am to be faithful today, what does God really want from me?*** It prompts one further question: ***Do I have “the right stuff” to do what God asks?*** The late George Carlin was one of my favorite comedians. An often irreverent observer of moral customs and values in America, Carlin had a genius for using comedy as social commentary and a remarkable talent for raising disturbing questions for us to consider. One of his best routines was about “stuff.” He observes:

That’s all I want, that’s all you need in life, is a little place for your stuff, ya know? Everybody’s got a little place for their stuff. This is my stuff, that’s your stuff, that’ll be his stuff over there. That’s all you need in life, a little place for your stuff. That’s all your house is: a place to keep your stuff. If you didn’t have so much stuff, you wouldn’t need a house. You could just walk around all the time. A house is just a pile of stuff with a cover on it. You can see that when you’re taking off in an airplane. You look down, you see everybody’s got a little pile of stuff. And when you leave your house, you gotta lock it up. Wouldn’t want somebody to come by and take some of your stuff. They always take the good stuff. They never bother with that junk you’re saving. All they want is the shiny stuff.

That's what your house is, a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get...more stuff! Sometimes you gotta move, gotta get a bigger house. Why? No room for your stuff anymore.

Micah's message is that if we're going to have "stuff" it ought to be "the right stuff." His point is that God cares about the clutter in our spiritual closets. God is concerned about the space in our souls. God loves us so very much that he wants us to unload the pointless, empty, destructive stuff so that we might be filled with *the right stuff: doing justice, loving mercy and kindness, and walking humbly with our God, staying attentive to his voice as we seek to do his will.*

Micah was a prophet who lived in a small settlement southwest of Jerusalem in the Eighth Century B.C. He was living at a frightening time. From the outside of the nation the mighty, savage armies of Assyria were coming to oppress the people (1:2ff). Inside the land, Micah saw chaos. The rich were taking advantage of the poor (2:1ff). The leaders abhorred justice (3:9). Corruption was synonymous with politics (3:11). In one vivid passage Micah despairs that the leaders *"tear the skin off my people and break their bones in pieces and chop them up like meat in a kettle"* (3:2-3).

Meanwhile, the priests and prophets collect their paychecks on Friday and stand in the pulpit on Sunday and bless this corruption and exploitation. "God is with us," they say. "No harm shall come upon us" (3:11). As the crisis intensifies, Micah tells his people that they have brought this disaster on themselves through their unfaithfulness to the one true God. He courageously confronts the religious leaders who fail to carry out their responsibilities. Micah speaks out against the moral disease of society, reminding

the nation that they are in desperate need of deliverance and redemption.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, so Micah raises the question that is before us today: *“With what shall I come before the Lord?” What does God want from us? What can we do about our situation?* Micah thinks first of “stuff” the people could bring to God. Each item on the list is a little better than the last: burnt offerings, calves a year old, thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil, my firstborn child—anything to get God’s attention and to gain his mercy and deliverance.

Did you notice that almost all the items on this list are things people give to God in worship? The list for us might read: sing a solo in which every note is in perfect pitch; fill the offering baskets with 90% of my income; offer up more of my time and talents 24/7. Micah never says there is anything inherently wrong with such “stuff.” But what God asks of us is radically different from what we come up with in our best thinking. You see, as with the people of Israel, God is concerned with the way we live out the implications of our relationship with him in our everyday affairs. *Like the people in Micah’s day, we can clutter our souls with all the wrong things in an effort to find meaning and fulfillment in life.*

We tend to make discipleship a complicated, stuff-filled process. We’ve got creeds, doctrines, rituals, traditions, denominational positions and structure, politically correct issues, liturgies, committee meetings, organs, bulletins, praise bands, web sites, beautiful buildings and stained glass. These things are fine if they strengthen our relationship with God and empower us to be Christ’s disciples in a broken world. However, if they obscure our vision of God and hinder our service to others they need to

be cleaned out and replaced with the right stuff.

Micah calls us to examine our lives and to get rid of the clutter and get filled with the right stuff: doing justice in our relationships; offering mercy and kindness to all; walking humbly with God as we take seriously his will. “Justice” has to do with *God’s order for the whole of life*. It includes legal justice, but it also expands to mean ordering every area of life—attitudes, actions, and relationships—in accordance with God’s will. Moses says that the test case of whether a person or a community is just is how we treat the orphan, the widow, the stranger, those who are legally helpless (Deut. 10:17-18). Doing justice means refusing to support social systems and institutions that disenfranchise others. It means doing the right thing!

To ***“love kindness”*** and to do ***“mercy”*** is to reflect the covenant love of a God who accepts us unreservedly and loves unconditionally. It is to be “long-suffering” in love, loving in the Jesus way. It means going the extra mile to seek out people who need mercy. It means showing hospitality to the stranger, coming alongside the hurting, and seeking to share the weight with those who bear heavy burdens.

“To walk humbly with God” is a kind of summary statement. It means we ought to stay “right-sized” and *never* take ourselves too seriously—but *always* take God and his will with utmost seriousness. In her book *Memories of God* Dr. Roberta Bondi puts it this way:

Humility is the key virtue that is both the starting point and the enabler of the whole Christian experience. Humility is not about groveling before God or other human beings. It has nothing to do with being passive, being a doormat, or

glorifying having a poor self-image. No, humility...means accepting ourselves and others just as we are, limitations, vulnerabilities, and major imperfections included, as already equally valuable and beloved of God without having to prove our worth by what we accomplish, what we own, what we do right, or by our status in society and in the church.

To be humble is to acknowledge that you are a creature and not the Creator, that you are finite and not infinite, that you are human and not God, that you know some things but not all things, that you do not have the final answer or word on anything. I am humble when I recognize that I am not the source of all the wisdom that I need, and I turn attentively to God for guidance and direction in life.

If we want to do what God requires, then in every situation and relationship we must ask, “Where does justice seem to lie here? What best expresses mercy and kindness? Where is the path of humility?” ***The good news is that God tells us what is good. God shows us what is just stuff—clutter that gets in the way of abundant life—and what is the right stuff, the stuff we need to be the people and community God calls us to be.***

Our need is not for *more* stuff—the spiritual clutter of complicated religiosity and good works piled upon more good works. Our need is for the *right* stuff—a selfless, Christ-centered spirituality that enables us to experience a relationship with God resulting in doing justice, treating others with kindness and mercy, and taking God and his will seriously.