

## ***Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time***

David Beckmann

RCL: Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12 LM: Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13; Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Matthew 5:1-12a

The passages from Micah and Zephaniah are clear about what God wants of us: humility, kindness, and justice. The passage from Micah tells how the Lord rescued his people from slavery and wandering in the desert. They owe more to God than animal sacrifices, more even than the sacrifice of their own children. What God requires is nothing less than their own hearts and lives. Zephaniah prophesies destruction and terror but believes that these, too, are ways that the Lord brings people to humility, obedience, and justice.

Psalm 146 is a wonderful complement to these passages from the prophets. The psalm praises the Lord for executing justice for the oppressed, giving food to hungry people, and upholding widows and orphans. The justice, kindness, and humility that the Lord requires of us are reflections of the Lord's own character.

Jesus reiterates the prophets' message in the Beatitudes, but in an especially demanding way. God offers blessing to those who are poor in spirit and who are meek to the point of mourning. God requires us to seek justice with a passion—and suffer for it. The Beatitudes make most Christians cringe. Those of us who live in comfort in the world's wealthy countries are not the meek of the earth; few of us suffer all that much for justice. In fact, I think we can only bear to listen to the Beatitudes with an open heart because it is Jesus who is talking to us. We know that Jesus loves us and will not reject us because we fall short.

Jesus' own life and death embody the Beatitudes. His death on the cross is kindness in the extreme. Rather than imposing God's will on the world, as people expected a messiah to do, Jesus forgives those who plotted against him and submits to suffering and death at their hands.

God then raises Jesus from the dead, as evidence that Jesus is indeed the Christ. By faith in him, we experience Jesus' forgiveness for our own sins. As Paul explains to the Corinthians, Jesus' cross is the basis for a Christian's relationship with God. The experience of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ moves us to express some of his self-giving Spirit in our own lives.

The whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, tells us that God is self-emptying and loving. In God's embrace, we become more generous and committed to justice ourselves.

### *Children's Time* [LH]

In advance, make a list of the ways your church embodies the three facets of Micah's charge, including programs children and adults take part in. Point out to the children that the Bible makes clear that loving God means more than going to church each Sunday. Worshiping God is important, but our faith is active in other ways too. Tell them about how the items on your list witness to the humble, caring, and justice-oriented work God calls us to do.

*Musical Suggestions* [LH] We Are Called—GC 718 What Does the Lord Require—UMH 441 O God of Love, O King of Peace—LBW 414 All Who Love and Serve Your City—BP 165