



Method: Our Wesleyan Way Worship Series

Sermon Title: "The Almost Christian"

Micah 6:1-8—2 February 2014

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Hear the lesson for the day from Micah 6:1-8:

1 Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. 2 Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel.

3 "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! 4 For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. 5 O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."

6 "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" 8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:1-8)

Most of us do not like people who break the law. When lawbreakers do, then we like to see them get their justice. I should say this is true about breaking the law and seeing justice done . . . except if it is you or one of yours who stands before the judge. Take for example the case of American student Amanda Knox who was again found guilty in the 2007 slaying of her British roommate, Meredith Kercher. It was a strange case in that she was found guilty and then that conviction was overturned two years later on appeal, only to have the decision later overruled this past week (from *Los Angeles Times* web site). Whether Amanda Knox is a perpetrator or victim—all depends on where you sit. If you are Meredith's parents you see it one way; if Amanda's parents then another way. Either way we are fixated with justice. Whether it is Josh Brent or Ethan Couch—we want the courts to do right.

Also note that we can see our fondness for courtroom drama in the fact



that the television show *Law & Order* premiered on September 13, 1990, and completed its 20th and final season on May 24, 2010. Even at the end it had many loyal followers. Spinoffs are numerous as well. We like to watch court and justice in action.

The prophecy from Micah opens in court as God says: “plead your case.” Israel seems to be on trial for disobeying and disregarding their Sinai covenant with Yahweh. The court’s witnesses are creation: the “mountains . . . hills” and “foundations of the earth.” God has a “bone to pick” with Israel. They have apparently forgotten that Yahweh saved them in the past and they have not responded in either faith or action.

I suggest that verse 5 seems crucial: “O my people, remember now . . . that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.” If we recall what God has done for us, then we anticipate what God will do for us and we respond as God’s people in kind.

What is justice we wonder? Although we like for others to get what they deserve, we rather prefer mercy when directed at us—whether or not we deserve it. This text ends with a well-known biblical quotation: “*what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.*”

Yet, there is a twist in Micah’s prophecy. At the beginning of the text we identify with Israel in God’s suit against her. Perhaps we hoped for mercy. Yet in God’s mercy, God only asks Israel to be merciful to others—“do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.” For us this seems like amazing grace—and no doubt it is.

My friend, Bob Long, pastor of St. Luke’s UMC in Oklahoma City told me a stirring personal story. Once in East Texas a DPS Officer pulled him over.



Bob's inspection sticker had expired three days before. But Bob wasn't worried. He thought he would just get a warning. Instead, Bob received a ticket for sixty-eight dollars—for a five-dollar inspection sticker that expired three days earlier!

He took the ticket home, tossed it on his desk and forgot about it. A month later, however, Bob opened a certified letter: "You failed to pay your fine and did not appear for your court date. Your fine is now three hundred fifty dollars. If you do not appear in the next seven days, a bench warrant will be issued for your arrest." Now Bob's sixty-eight-dollar ticket had grown weighty for a simple five-dollar inspection sticker. Bob immediately called and got a court date.

He arrived at court and found that the courthouse was a sheet-metal building in the middle of a cornfield, and wasn't even a courthouse, but rather a dance hall. There were folding chairs sitting on a concrete floor. Behind a high bench sat a judge who exerted complete control. Bob watched as the people approached the bench. They would confess their sins, and then the judge would slam down the gavel and pronounce sentence. The judge dispensed justice quickly and absolutely.

Bob realized he had made a mistake. Now he worried about what the judge might say about his failure to pay his initial ticket. Abruptly, the court clerk called his name. When Bob approached the desk, the clerk said, "We've lost your paperwork."

Bob said, "I brought you the letter you mailed to me."

"I know," she said, "You did everything right but we've lost your paperwork."

"Well, what does that mean?" he asked.



She said, “It’s like nothing ever happened. We will simply forget your crime. You’re free to go. Good night and good-bye.”

Bob told me that he ran for the door, jumped in his car, and took off before the court changed its mind. Free to go. All is forgiven.

Our foremost feeling as we ponder God’s justice is fear. We like to see others get their just desserts, but we like mercy when we are at fault. However, with Jesus as our advocate, we have a champion who has a lot of pull with the judge. In my view, this is a good kind of friend to have. If you want to enjoy God’s mercy, then get in touch with God’s son—Jesus. Jesus is our friend who loses the paperwork. Amen.

David Neil Mosser, FUMC, Arlington, TX 76011