

Acting, Loving and Walking In Justice, Mercy and Humility

Micah 6:8

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?*

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (NIV)

(The translation from The Message puts it this way)

*But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do,
what GOD is looking for in men and women.
It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor,
be compassionate and loyal in your love,
And don't take yourself too seriously—
take God seriously.*

The Pastor – Presbyterian Church Staff Associate you are listening to this morning on the outside may look like a Native American. And I am – descended from the Pima, T'hono O'odham and Nez Perce tribes.

But what isn't evident is the Norwegian/English ancestry that I inherited from my grandmother, Helen Moffett, my mother's mother. It was hard for her marrying into a Nez Perce Indian family who didn't like her for being white. And it was even harder because her family disowned her for marrying an Indian.

Despite what my grandmother's family taught her about white people staying in their own world and that Indians should stay in theirs, she allowed her heart to tell her otherwise. She learned the Nez Perce language, sang hymns in Nez Perce, cooked their foods, and became as much a part of the Nez Perce community in that little town of Kamiah as any Nez Perce woman ever could be.

Micah 6:8 asks us what the Lord requires of us. There are many different ways to answer this question. You might have a passion for Evangelism. So you focus on

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the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19–20. Or you might be more focused on worship and emphasize verses like Psalm 95:6.

God tells us to “do justice.” Maybe some of us struggle to know what it means to do justice. How did I do justice this past week? What does it look like? We have often defined justice by placing it primarily in a political, economic, or judicial realm, but that can be distant from our daily lives.

The elephant in the room, in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA, in the American Christian community within the last 20-years or more has been justice, in particular - The Doctrine of Discovery.

And if we think that this Doctrine comes from historic times gone-by, you need to know that it was cited by the U.S. Supreme Court as the basis of our laws as recently as 2005, just 18 years ago.

The vote was 8-1 against the Oneida tribe who purchased traditional tribal lands 200 years after it was taken from them. The Court held that the land couldn't not be taken into tribal trust because of the Doctrine of Discovery.

The International Day of the World's Indigenous People honors the indigenous communities of the world. According to the most recent data, there are between 370 and 500 million indigenous people residing in 90 countries. These communities are distinguished by their distinct languages, customs, cultures, and administrative structures.

For many indigenous groups, the systems that their ancestors have followed for centuries have withstood the test of time and continue to yield positive results. Many indigenous peoples' unique similarity and connection with nature have also contributed to the protection of the global ecosystem.

On the other hand, several indigenous communities confront difficulties due to the hidden and obvious efforts of governments to control their lives. This has resulted in

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violations of the rights of indigenous people, whose lives would otherwise be peaceful and balanced as it had been before 1492.

The clearing of the rain forests and jungles of South America have wreaked havoc upon the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin for decades and is only getting worse. What medicines, animal species or technologies are being lost because of modern society's lust for oil, minerals and precious wood?

In August 1995, the first official International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples was observed. The day was established when the United Nations General Assembly enacted a resolution in 1994. The date of August 9 was chosen to commemorate the first meeting of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

Every year, governments and organizations celebrate the day by conducting education forums and conferences to discuss the social issues facing indigenous groups worldwide. In addition, individuals are informed of any ongoing and/or prospective activities and projects that are being conducted to assist the target communities.

The theme for 2021 was "Leaving no one behind: Indigenous peoples and the call for a new social contract"

The theme of the social contract is a demand for accountability in the interaction of the general population with indigenous communities and their resources. UNESCO have made efforts towards constitutional/legislative reforms for dominant indigenous groups.

In the U.S., Indigenous, African, people of color and women had to struggle, and continue to struggle, to be included in "We the People" and "...all men are created equal."

The church is called, as the Body of Christ, to seek and establish the kin-dom of God. We cannot do this by collaborating *with* or by giving our consent *to* unjust and

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violent structures. We *can* learn much more about how the Doctrine of Discovery is a racist, destroyer of Indigenous civil rights.

This doesn't seem to be what Micah was trying to tell us “. . . *To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*”

The church is involved in many battles beyond the church doors. The encounter of Christians and the world's Indigenous peoples is too complex and varied to be characterized in general.

There are surprising instances, such as the late 18th century Russian missionaries in Alaska, where they saw the Tlingit people of Kodiak Island as deeply religious, understanding faith in terms of their own.

More often, however, Christian missionaries did not recognize the customs of the Native peoples as spiritual or their religious traditions as uniquely spiritual, in their own right.

Instead, Christian churches and the federal government effectively removed Native American children from their cultures by demanding their attendance at boarding schools to assimilate them into American culture and where many became victims of sexual, mental and physical abuse for generations.

Pedophiles, sadists and criminals found their way into some of these schools and when discovered, were often moved to other schools. Children were not only mistreated by these criminals but there is documentation of their being responsible for the deaths of many children. They were buried at the schools and often parents were never informed.

There was a day in the Christian church when a Native Americans would not be allowed to preach as I am. Native people would have to get permission to even leave the boundaries of the reservation they were held upon.

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This was where the saying, “off the reservation” came from and why Native people consider it demeaning.

Native Americans, slaves, Chinese, Mexicans and other people of color weren’t allowed to sit in the main church seats but had to sit up in the balconies where summer temperatures had to be endured – the days before air conditioning.

Our definition of justice is “to create a world where all people have equal opportunity to fully develop the gifts that God has placed within them.”

In our daily lives, we all have the opportunity to do justice with actions that help people help themselves. In this, we are creating an environment where people can thrive and achieve their full potential.

Repentance and Confession are two ways in which Christians can begin making amends for turning a blind eye to the destruction of the Indigenous cultures, of Indigenous peoples around the world and even being complicit in those actions.

Micah’s words, just one verse has sometimes been called the Gospel in miniature: He writes about acknowledging the need for reconciliation. The text presents Micah’s observation of violence and injustice in his time.

Micah paints a picture of political oppression and economic exploitation by the powerful against the weak and oppressed (6:12), and how they despise justice and distort the right.

Some of those settlers who stole land, supplies, livestock and money from Native people were Christians and ministers of God’s Word. Some of them went on to become quite wealthy. Their descendants, their towns and cities have prospered from this theft – even today.

Micah invites the nation to restore and reconcile the broken relationship with God and with their neighbors. What does God expect of his people? Instead of “material” things, God wants faithful relationships and unflinching harmony.

Doing justice and loving kindness, stand at the center of Israel’s faith-talk. The first command concerns the love of neighbor. The second command concerns the love of God.

Micah’s first two commandments summarize the whole message of the Old Testament and resonate in the Great Commandment of Jesus recorded in the New Testament (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5), (Mark 12:28-31; Matt. 22:37-40).

God’s people continue to be challenged to know what God wants from us. Maybe The Church has not been serious enough in our acts of praise. What Micah stresses is that ritual worship alone is not enough; a journey of justice and peace must be part of our Christian life today.

When Jesus calls us to love our neighbor, the word “love” is not an emotional feeling but an action verb. God calls us to do justice as part of our worship experience and our acts of justice should be part of our liturgy. But words don’t matter if they aren’t followed by actions. “Faith without works are nothing.”

There are two components to walking humbly with our God: If we are to please God, we must *walk* with God. God must be a significant part of our everyday lives—a constant companion, guide, and stay. We must allow God to lead us.

Then, if we are to please God, we must walk *humbly* with God. A person who is humble is not arrogant or boastful. A person who walks humbly with God understands that everything that they possess is a gift of God. All our talents that produce this lifestyle originate with God.

A person who walks humbly with God will try to determine where God would have them go rather than trying to set their direction based on their own wisdom. I never knew that being a pastor in Tacoma, WA would also include being on the staff for the national church.

To be truly humble, to be truly the Body of Christ, the church we must give up all nonsense that gets in the way of justice and rely on God as “our help and our

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shield”. Reconciliation is hard work. But God is with us in the pursuit. An apology is only the beginning of reconciliation if it’s to be genuine.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to God, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

Native American Day – 9/22/21

International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples – 8/9/23

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