

Will We Do Justice, Kindness, and Love?

The Love that is God gathers us together for a time of reflection on this twenty-fifth of twenty-six Sundays in the long, green growing season of ordinary time in the circle of the church year. We find ourselves welcome on land which has lived in relationship with many people groups for millennia before us. As we enter into a time of wondering (Will we do justice, kindness, and love?), let's begin with prayer:

God of all, may the posture of each of our spirits be open as we welcome your Holy Loving Spirit to move within each of us and among us today. Amen.

Friends in faith, I am a die-hard fan of honesty. The shadow side of my propensity for candor is that my thoughts and feeling can come out in raw or blunt ways if I don't take a moment to massage my delivery. The bright side of my propensity for honesty is that, in most matters, people with whom I relate can count on me to be forthright in my response, not leaving another shoe to drop.

I find a thread of honesty connecting our scripture readings for today from Psalm 90 and Micah 6. The Psalmist focuses on how God's love has power both to confront and to embrace us. Let's sit for a moment with the least comfortable verses from the Psalm – the ones where the Psalmist feels God's anger.

We heard: *"For we are consumed by your anger;
by your wrath we are overwhelmed.*

*You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your countenance.*

So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart."

God (that is, Love) does sometimes feel displeased and even becomes inflamed (like an angry wound) in the face of injustice, unkindness, and empty pride. Love's holy, clarifying anger is what creates an internal response in our gut, emotions, or mind when we witness our own missteps into injustice, unkindness, and empty pride or the missteps of another.

Hear these words: *"Heav'n has no rage, like love to hatred turn'd, Nor hell a fury, like a woman scorn'd."* Those words (often misquoted as coming from William Shakespeare) come from early 18th century English playwright William Congreve in a tragedy entitled *"The Mourning Bride"* (as in the grieving bride.) We are acquainted with the rage and fury that Love ignites when we witness human-to-human scorn – that is contemptuous, hurtful behavior.

I wonder, what do you do when Love ignites your holy anger in the face of injustice, unkindness, and empty pride (be it at an interpersonal level that touches you or in a systems context)?

We can choose to pray with the Psalmist: *"So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart."* We can invite God's love in the form of anger to open new avenues in our gut, emotions, and mind such that we find our way toward deeper loyalty to justice, kindness, and love. Today's words from the Psalmist remind me of treasured words from Thomas Merton scholar and retreat leader James Finley, who once wrote this (which I often quote): *"If we are absolutely grounded in the absolute love of God that protects us from nothing even as it sustains us in all things, then we can face all things with courage and tenderness and touch the hurting places in others and in ourselves with love."*

May we carry with us these words of encouragement from both the Psalmist and James Finley as we face into challenging moments.

Let's turn now to our reading from the prophetic work of Micah. The prophet calls our attention to the reality that our routines and habits (even our cherished religious rituals) that are not sustaining our relationship with God might need a second look. Micah reminds the people (then and now) what genuine worship (devotion to God's Love) could look like.

Micah articulates this at the beginning of the reading, channeling the voice of God's Love:

"Hear now what God says... 'O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Give me an answer!'"

Given that the Love of God is ever-present, ever-knowing, and ever-powerful (all of those things – at a level beyond our comprehension), the Love of God within and among us is very aware of our weariness from efforts of embodying Christ-like justice, kindness, and love.

Yet, even in our weariness, we are naturally eager to do God's will, and we are curious about how we can improve upon our efforts. And the prophet Micah saw that. He saw the goodness in the hearts of the people surrounding him several thousand years ago. Micah can also help us remember our own goodness, see goodness in one another, and even see goodness in our opponents.

We heard the prophet repeating what they often heard their fellow citizens ask: *"'What shall I bring when I come before God, and bow down before God on high?' you ask."*

Then Micah summarizes the law of Love in a beautifully timeless way. We heard: *“Listen here, mortal: God has already made abundantly clear what ‘good’ is, and what God needs from you: simply do justice, love kindness, and humbly walk with your God.”*

I invite you to wonder with me this morning: Will we do justice, kindness, and Love? This is a question for which a response of “yes!” relies on hope-based trust in God’s presence with us.

If you’d like, please gather into your hands this slip of paper from the worship bulletin and a pen. And I invite you to jot two simple prompts for yourself. Will we...? Will I...?” You’ll have an opportunity to place this in the giving basket later in the service. So, I will see it. Feel free to either write your name on it if you would like me to follow up with you or leave it anonymous. So, Will we...? Will I...?” Let’s each write for ourself questions that share with God our longings for specific ways that we will embody love, justice and kindness as a congregation and as individuals in the coming time. Write those actions – those behaviors that you’re hoping will be part of love, justice, and kindness. Let us take a moment of silence to do that.

We would love to hear a few if anyone would like to speak aloud a simple question for us or for themselves. And feel free either to keep these for yourselves or bring it forward later in the service. My first question is: Will we build intergenerational relationships? Would anyone else like to speak aloud one of their questions? Will we respect everyone’s feelings and convey love and care even when we don’t understand? Will we merge in spirit? Feel welcome to bring these forward later in the service if you’d like to share them with me.

Let us move into the coming time, eager to answer the question (Will we do justice, kindness and love?) with a resounding “yes!” By God’s grace, we will – because Love is counting on us. Amen.

Rev. Clare Gromoll
St. Croix United Church (Bayport, MN)
November 19, 2023 (Stewardship Sunday)
Psalm 90: 1-8,12; Micah 6:1-8