

Micah 5:2-4; 6:6-8
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Like many of you, there have been times when I have had to completely reframe my life based on new realities. Our first daughter, Maggie, was born on a very snowy day in February nearly 25 years ago. After our brief hospital stay we were happy, if apprehensive, about going home. The drive was terrifying. I couldn't believe the nurses would let us take this tiny, fragile bundle with us, having no idea if Ted and I were equal to the task of caring for her. Once home, I collapsed into our own bed, exhausted from 40 weeks of gestation and morning sickness, 24 hours of labor, two hours of pushing, two crummy nights' sleep in the hospital and that long, slow, nerve-wracking drive home - all of two miles. Waking that first night to her hungry cry was like swimming up out of mud. I ached with fatigue. And had no idea at that time that fatigue was just beginning. Ted got up to change her diaper and went back to bed as Maggie and I tried to figure out this breast-feeding thing in the dark without the confident assurance of nurses to coach us along. After limited success she fell asleep and I crawled back into bed. And three hours later we did it again. And again. It was a shocking reframing of the life we had built in that cozy, little house on Hubbard Avenue.

Parenting was just one reframing, when we were suddenly governed entirely by the biological, emotional and developmental needs of a tiny mewling creature who knew me only as the font of all nutrition and quick response times. Even after our kids were able to tend to their own biology, there was homework, soccer practice, friendship drama, prom, college visits and a whole host of priorities for which our children rightly expected our support and encouragement.

Becoming an employee was another, earlier reframing; with a new schedule to adhere to and tasks to be carried out. I had to obey a calendar, a time clock and a boss. I had to learn that crafting an effective interoffice memo was not an opportunity to express my facility with the literary process. When I became a wife, I learned that my life was no longer my own. From the moment I said "I do;" there was another person to be considered in all things: time, money, emotional investment and which way to hang the toilet paper on the roll. No more could I just take off for the weekend with friends or quit my job and move to another state. Change by change, each of us reframes our lives to reflect new commitments and new relationships.

The prophet Micah is calling the people of God to a similar reframing.

First some back ground. Micah is working in the countryside of the Southern Kingdom of the divided monarchy around 722 BCE. The Northern kingdom has fallen. It is a time of religious and political corruption. The first prophet writing as Isaiah is also at work at this time - in Jerusalem, in the urban center of political and religious life. Isaiah has insisted that Jerusalem will not fall. But Micah has a different point of view. Micah is in the countryside, where the repercussions of urban decision making are a sharply lived reality. As he stands in the shadow cast by the great walled city, Micah calls the people of God to a different expectation.

Micah is the first prophet to speak of the real possibility that Jerusalem will fall. And that Jerusalem will fall because of the faithlessness and transgressions of the people of God.

Through Micah, we hear the cries of God: "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! 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. O my people, remember now...that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.”

The people have forgotten all that the Lord has done for them. Again. They have turned from authentic faithfulness to false religiosity. One writer speaks of “their religion projects, pretentious slogans and noisy ego-music.” (*The Message; Amos 5*) Whatever religion it is they are practicing, it is not faithful recognition of God’s abundant blessing; it is not an expression of gratitude and humility for such abundance. It is false, puffed up and sinful.

Micah, speaking for God, calls the people to reframe their lives within the story of a God who has led them to freedom and showered them with generosity and loving-kindness. God is not asking for rivers of oils or stockyards full of cattle to appease God because God is not asking for appeasement. God is asking for transformation and participation. God is asking the people to let their lives reflect the generosity that God has shown them.

When faced with work, a new marriage and the arrival of children, I could have refused to let my life be reframed by any of them; in which case I would have failed at all of them. Because it wasn’t the fact of becoming a mother that reframed me. It was becoming a mother coupled with what I believe a mother is. Just as getting married reframed my life only because of what I believe a spouse is.

Micah is calling the people of God to reframe their lives because of who God is. Micah calls the people to let their lives reflect the unstinting generosity they have received from God. Show justice as you have been shown justice, share covenant love - loving-kindness because you have

been shown the same; and walk humbly, that is: remember, always remember who God is. This is not a new reality. This is who God has always been. Let your lives reflect it.

What was happening in Micah's time is still happening. People chose in a limited understanding of God. They believed that God was someone to appease or something to achieve. If they were pious and righteous and brought forth rivers of oil and stockyards of cattle, even their first born mewling creatures, they could be prideful that they had done what was necessary. If they failed in their attempt, they despaired, fearing that the favor of God would turn from them and abandon them. Both of these responses fail to acknowledge the unmerited generosity and holy justice of a God who demands nothing more than letting our lives reflect the blessings we have been show for generation upon generation.

We still struggle with "getting God right." We get bogged down in a limited understanding of a moral and righteous life and understand justice as something on a balance sheet. We don't do it because we are bad or stupid or faithless. We do it because even after millennia, the truth about God is just too much to fathom. We live in a capitalistic, democratic society where we are rewarded for our successes and held accountable or even punished for our failures. How then are we EVER to grasp that success cannot guarantee and failure cannot exclude the raw, boundless, unfathomable gift of grace; the unconditional love of God who celebrates us just as we are: jealous or generous, striving or patient, competitive or hospitable. All of who you are is held in the arms of God who has showered us loving-kindness day after day, generation after generation.

Ultimately it is in Jesus that we see the fullness of God's self-giving love for a stubborn, inward looking people. Jesus is like the tender underbelly of God's love, vulnerable and exposed. And when we got that wrong, when we responded to vulnerability and love with fear and violence, God countered with forgiveness and new life. In Jesus, God set us free from the limits of our inward seeking nature. God didn't completely change us. God loved us as we are and removed the limits we imposed on ourselves. God created within us a capacity to reflect the love of God. This is what Micah is trying to make us hear: You are the beloved of a generous God. Let your lives reflect who God has been to you and who you are to God. What are you afraid of? What is holding you back? You have been set free!

We no longer have to fear the scorn of one neighbor when we seek the just treatment of another. We can show love to the unlovely and know that we are pleasing God, even if others deride us. We can be humble, we can know that God is God and we are not; and we can do it without that we won't get our share. We don't need to build little fiefdoms and make sure we keep enough power for ourselves because God give us all that we need. Every day.

There is nothing that stands in the way of letting your most extravagant, loving and generous self out. In fact, when we get in our own way, when we re-impose limits that God has removed with God's own blood, we distort our true humanity and make ourselves sick. We have been set free to live free. This isn't about who you should be, it is who you are - just as you are. Imagine life free, extravagantly generous and bounding in the love we know in God. Truly there are no barriers that God hasn't already given us the power to overcome. Amen