What God Wants from Us

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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)

1. The Father Brings Charges

Recently I watched a documentary on tv. It is a case of a woman who was killed by a gun fire at home. The son who found his mother's body in the living room called 911. The gun used by the suspect was one of guns owned by the family. The gun was kept in the basement. Only family members knew where the gun was.

The police searched for the killer. They suspected that the killer would be one of the family members. The father later sued the same son who found the mother. The father believed that the son would be the one who committed the crime.

2. The Israelites are Prosecuted

The situation of Micah chapter 6 is very similar to this documentary. The prophet Micah says that God has a "controversy" with the people and "contend" with them. The Message Bible Micah 6:1 & 2 says, "***Listen now, listen to God: "Take your stand in court. If you have a complaint, tell the mountains; make your case to the hills. And now, Mountains, hear God's case; listen, Jury Earth-For I am bringing charges against my people. I am building a case against Israel***." The author says that God is not happy with his people Israel and that God brings charges against his people. If Israel supposes that God is wrongly accusing Israel, God challenges them to defend themselves with evidence to the mountains and hills. The mountains and hills are the jury

because they have seen what Israel has done throughout the years. The mountains and hills can witness that Israel has wronged both God and God's people.

Let me share with you the background of the Book of Micah. Micah prophecies sometime between 750 and 686 B.C. during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Micah is a contemporary of Isaiah. Micah looks beneath the surface of Judah's society. He sees fundamental flaws that will result in the nation's downfall. Greed and dishonesty permeate the nation. People disregard the poor and practice unethical business. Ironically, all this takes place while Judah publicly professes to the faithful to the true God. The people are hypocrites. Their religion is a sham and God is angry.

Throughout Israel's history, God remembers his people and the covenant that he made at Mt. Sinai. In verse 3, God asks Israel to answer what God has done wrong to them. God seems to reveal his frustration to Israel. God asks Israel if she has any charges against the Lord. In verses 4 & 5, God reminds her of what God has been doing for Israel. God has brought Israel out of Egypt and redeemed the people from the land of slavery through Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. God reminds the people of the Balak-Balaam encounter. Although Balak asks Balaam to curse Israel as they march through the wilderness, God thwarts all of Balaam's efforts and safely leads the people from Shittim on the east of the Jordan to Gilgal on the west.

Verses 6 & 7 are Israel's response to the implied charge against her. Israel, the defendant, asks God what the Lord wants. ***"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?"*** Israel asks God, what must she brings with her when she comes into God's presence that will make her acceptable? Will the Lord be pleased with sacrifices like "burnt offerings"? Would offerings of rams and of oil satisfy God?

3. What God Wants

How does God answer Israel? In verse 8, Micah answers. What God requires of them is to ***act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God****."* The Israelites are religious, but their understanding of what religion means is far from God's hopes for them. God wants them to be a voice for oppressed persons, widows, foreigners, handicapped persons, minorities, elderly persons, poor persons, homeless persons, and addicted persons.

God wants us to love mercy. The Hebrew word hesed means God's loving-kindness. We respond to God's love by sharing it with others. We are to walk humbly with God. Deuteronomy 10:12 says, "***So now, O Israel, what***

does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." Moses tells the Israelites that they are to fear, follow, love, and serve the Lord with all their heart and soul. When we walk with God, we listen to what God says and learn what God wants. Then we follow his directions.

Who walked humbly with the Lord throughout history? Jesus did. He prays at the garden of Gethsemane, "***My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want***" (Matthew 26:39). Jesus' prayer tells us what attitude Jesus has in his relationship with God. Paul says in Philippians 2:8, "***he (Jesus) humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-even death on a cross***." In Jesus' day, death on a cross was the form of capital punishment. It did not make sense to Jesus and his disciples that the Messiah would die on the cross. But Jesus did it because he believed that his death on a cross was God's will. Jesus knew how to please God.

4. Is Our Heavenly Father Happy?

Last Sunday we celebrated Father's Day." We said to one another, "Happy Father's Day." What makes our fathers happy? Do Father's Day cards and gifts make our fathers happy? Fathers are happiest when their children have an intimate relationship with them. Last Sunday, a few questions came to my mind. Was my father happy with me? Is my heavenly father happy with me? I am not sure my earthly father was happy. My heavenly father may not be happy either. I want my children to visit us at least once a year. But I did not visit my parents that often. How can I please the Lord? God would want me to walk with him always. God would want us to listen to what God says and follow his directions.

What do you think God is saying to us this morning? Today's scripture is this year's New England Conference theme. The New England Conference focus is on justice. The conference thinks we don't act justly. As a conference, we do not welcome everyone with open hearts and minds. That may be true. However, I believe that when we focus on "humbly walking with the Lord," we can do justice and love mercy.

Throughout Abraham Lincoln's tenure as President of the USA, he faced many difficult issues, including slavery and the Civil War. During these trials, he had convictions that God would be with him. One day he was asked if God was on his side. Lincoln said, "Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right." Are we on God's side?

5. Conclusion

When we pray, we tell God what we want. Quite often we ask God what to do. We do not ask God what God wants us to do. In the eighth century BCE, the

prophet Micah would find the same problem. People did not ask what God would want them to do. If we do not ask what God wants us to do, we may not know what God wants. Have you heard Eugene Peterson's definition of prayer? He says, "Prayer gets us in on what God is doing." We tend to think that prayer is to ask God for what we want. But Peterson believes that through prayer we learn what God wants us to get involved in. What do you think God would say to us this morning? God would say the same thing as Micah says in verse 8: "do justice, love mercy, and humbly walk with your God."

6. Application

During the New England Annual Conference. The Bible study speaker Dr. Elaine Heath reminded us of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer said. Bonhoeffer said in his Letters and Papers from Prison, "the church is the church only when it exists for others… not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others." He said, if the church does not exist for others, the church is not the church. If we do not live our lives for others, we may not know why God called us to follow Jesus.

I was happy to see many people at the strawberry festival yesterday. It was a wonderful opportunity for us to meet many people in the community. Some came from the Scusset campsite. I realized that many people in this community want to have a better relationship with others. They want to participate in fun activities. I would like to remind us of what Bonhoeffer said about the church. The church does not exist for the members but to serve others. Yesterday someone said that she wished we could do something like the strawberry festival every week. There are so many people who need help.

I am so grateful that our church gets involved in supporting others and mission organizations. However, I am sure there are more people whom God may want us to help. We have two AA groups using our church buildings. Others churches have more AA groups. I've heard about the opioid crisis on Cape Cod and the Islands? Statistics say that 516 people lost their lives to opioid overdoses from 2000-2016 in the region. In 2016 alone, 82 people died on the Cape and Islands from opioid overdoses-a nearly 8 percent increase from 2015. Barnstable County ranked No. 3 statewide for fatal overdose rates in 2015 and 2016. I wonder whether God wants us to do something for these people.

Why do we have to care about those who suffer? It is because God wants us to be the extended hands and feet of Jesus Christ who fed, healed and saved lives of many people.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer teaches us another important lesson. He says. "Seek God, not happiness. This is the fundamental rule of all meditation. If you seek God alone, you will gain happiness: that is its promise." I pray that all of us humbly walk with the Lord always so that we do justice and love mercy. And we would please God and our days are filled with joy and happiness. Amen.