



Sermon on Micah 6:1-8
November 8/9, 2014
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Please pray with me. Speak, O Lord, in words that we can hear. Open our hearts to your word, and plant the light of your truth deep in our hearts. Amen.

In the movie Office Space, Jennifer Aniston's character is a waitress at a restaurant that requires the wait staff wear 15 pieces of what they call flair, which are expressive buttons. Jennifer Aniston's character follows the rules and wears precisely 15 pieces of flair, and yet her boss is far from happy. He scolds her, pointing out a co-worker who wears 37 pieces of flair, simply because he wants to—because he is that enthusiastic about flair. At the end of the scene, Jennifer Aniston's character is flabbergasted, trying to figure out precisely how many pieces of flair her boss wants her to wear.

A similar thing happened in Micah's time, as the people come to God asking what outward display of love would be make God happy: would burnt offerings do the trick? Young calves? Rivers of oil? Even a firstborn child?

When I was in high school, I'll never forget when a student asked our religion teacher how much we were required to go to church, and how long we have to stay when we go, and this wasn't part of any sort of assignment, but the teacher actually told us that you have to go to church at least once a month and that you must arrive by the start of the sermon and can't leave before receiving communion. Do that and you're good to go.

We can fall into the trap of thinking about any part of our faith this, as a transaction or a requirement.

Since we're in the midst of our stewardship campaign, consider the question of how much money you should be giving to church.

- And does anyone know what percentage we typically say we should be giving to the church? Yes, 10% is what we usually say

And for many that is a great goal, but if we think of it as a requirement

We run two risks,

- First we might end up judging those, including ourselves, who don't give 10% as deficient in their faith,

- And 2nd, we might use that requirement as an excuse to stop growing once we've reached that 10% threshold, mistakenly thinking that we've done what's required, that the box is checked and God is satisfied.

The reality is that God is much more interested in relationship than he is in requirements.

He is not a divine scorekeeper. He's not going to give us a grade at the end of this life, and we won't earn anything from our attendance at church or the amount of time or money we donate.

What God wants is for us to walk with him. What Jesus wants is for us to follow.

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.”

But, we have to be honest with ourselves: walking with God will not happen by accident. Sometimes I get a bit jealous of the disciples, because they had before them a very concrete decision each and every day. They woke up in the morning and they literally had to decide whether they would be walking where Jesus walked or not.

For us the choice is not as concrete, but in my life it requires the same level of deliberateness. It is so much like working out:

· How many of us have ever told ourselves that we will work out later: after dinner, after that tv show, after finishing just one more chapter. And I hope you're way better than I am at this, but for me, after just one more t.v. show, it's usually darker and colder outside, and a plush blanket along with some Halloween candy and a glass of wine suddenly have a new allure.

My intentions are usually good—I'd would LOVE to have rock-hard abs, or at least be in really good shape, but if I'm not intentional about scheduling a time to do that, it simply doesn't happen.

The same is true of our walk with God; none of us gets up in the morning and says: “Well, I don't think I'll walk with God today. Today I think I'd like to ignore God.” What happens is that other things take priority, and before we know it, even though God is still walking with us, we're not paying attention to him.

The other complicating factor in my lack of rock-hard abs is that the longer I go without working out, the harder it is to get up the willpower to go back. I know everything will be more difficult: I won't be able to stay on the machine for as long, or lift as many weights. And it becomes easier and easier to stay away.

Our walk with God can be this way, too. When we haven't been making space for God in while, it can feel overwhelming, and guilt might keep us away, too, if we feel like we haven't been giving or doing what we should.

But I want to point back to Micah.

The people of Micah's time might have been showing up at church, but Micah tells us that it had been quite some time since they had been truly walking with God—instead they were constantly oppressing the poor and using their power corruptly.

And yet what God does would make a great scene in a Romance Movie. Like a lovesick teenager who spends every night outside his beloved's window, serenading her, but who, night after night, gets no response, God is heart-broken. He cries out: What have I done wrong! Why don't you love me! Answer me! And then he goes on to make a list of everything he has ever done right in the relationship.

Now at this point we are nearly to the end of the OT and still the people can't figure out how to be in a relationship with God; at every turn they mess up. If this were a Romantic Comedy, God would walk away in tears and all his friends would tell him that there are more fish in the sea and it's time to move on.

And that's why what God does is astounding. He doesn't do what we would do. He doesn't end the relationship, doesn't slam the door on his way out. He invites them back. Gives them another and another and another chance until Jesus comes and dies to ensure we have as many chances as we could ever need. Regardless of what yesterday looked like, today he invites us who have sorted pasts but good intentions to follow, and to walk alongside him out into the world to do justice and love kindness.

Amen.