

Who doesn't love to put together furniture from places like IKEA or Wayfair or Amazon? Yeehaw! I for one, love that box that comes with a million pieces and chicken scratch for instructions. It's why when my kitchen table arrived I made a desperate plea to have someone put it together! Maybe your experiences have been something like this:

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Like these couples, the people of Israel were struggling in their walk with God. The problem for them was using the wrong pieces and the wrong instructions. They didn't understand a key component. Some humility was required.

Today we are going to look at the minor prophet Micah. He wrote the words in our scripture passage. Micah lived at the same time as the First Isaiah did. Perhaps you remember from our series last year about Isaiah and the fact that this was a low point in Judah's history. They were misled by the wicked King Ahaz, and now they were worse off than ever. Ahaz was a religious opportunist, worshipping whatever the god flavor of the day was. He had the audacity to close the Lord's temple and build pagan shrines on every street corner in Jerusalem. He even sacrificed his own children to the Canaanite god Molech.

The people living in Judah weren't much better. Corruption at the courts and among the priests was common. Prostitution and incest was rampant. The rich grew richer at the expense of the poor. Well God had had enough. Through the prophet Micah God said to the people, "Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. Hear, O mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me" (**Micah 6:1-3**).

Yes, once again we have a courtroom drama. This time the mountains and hills are God's jury. God demands an explanation from Judah. This wasn't the first time that mountains were witnesses to such proceedings between God and his people. During Moses' time, Mt. Sinai looked on as God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel. Before that Ararat witnessed God's

promise to Noah to never send a worldwide flood again. In Micah's time the mountains and hills weren't just witnesses, they were sources of evidence against Judah. Pagan shrines littered the hills, so what could Israel say to defend herself? What logical reason could they have for their unfaithfulness?

God had not burdened them. God did nothing to warrant the way Judah was treating him and the rest of Israel. Wasn't it God who always protected and always provided for Israel? God reminds them through Micah. "I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD".

Again, what had God done? Not only did God rescue Israel from slavery but He provided Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Leaders for their journey across the desert. God protected Israel from Balak, the evil king of Moab, who hired Balaam to curse Israel. Except, every time Balaam opened his mouth to curse, God caused blessings to pour out of his mouth instead of curses.

In their journey from Shittim to Gilgal God held back the flood-stage waters of the Jordan River so that all the people could cross over into the Promised Land on dry land. There in the Promised Land the daily blessings of manna stopped but God provided food for them by allowing them to eat the fruit of the Promised Land. No, God had not burdened his people but blessed them every step of the way.

Hasn't God blessed all of our steps in the same way? Not only are we rescued from the slavery of sin, but also provided gifted leaders starting with our parents, Then there are the Sunday School teachers, choir directors, and pastors to guide and direct us in our life. Think about how you were kept safe from harm when you got lost. Think about how many blizzards or storms you've had to drive through and arrived at your destination safely. And if that wasn't enough, what about our daily bread, soup, milk, pasta, chicken. God truly leaves us lacking for little if anything.

What should our response be to all this? How about starting with the question, “Lord why are you so good to me?!?” That is not how Israel responded. Instead they responded like this. “With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

It honestly sounds like a kid who’s been busted. “OK God, you busted me. I haven’t honored you like I should. So what’s it going to cost me? Hey, I know. How about a burnt offering? I’ll bring you the very best yearling. No wait, I’ll also offer a thousand rams and how about I throw in ten thousand rivers of oil? Still not enough? What about my firstborn? Yes, they dared to suggest that God would want the sacrifice of a child?”

Israel thought they could treat God like another one of their corrupt judges. They thought that if they could offer God just the right bribe, they’d be left alone so they could go on living their lives the way they wanted to.

Which is not the response God was looking for. Micah delivers the verdict, “He has showed you, O man, 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”.

God wasn’t looking for a paltry sacrifice that would allow them to continue in their evil ways. No, God wanted true repentance from Israel. But first, they needed an attitude adjustment. This meant acting justly, doing the right thing for the right reason.

It wasn’t that sacrifice itself is a wrong thing for them to do. In fact God commanded Israel to do just that when they sinned. The problem was in the reason why they were offering sacrifices. It wasn’t with a willing heart; it was because felt like they had to. And forget about any plans to change their behaviors afterwards. So their worship was now a mere formability, a ritual with no bearing on the way every-day life was lived.

And has anything changed today? Anyone can do things like go to church and bring our offerings, but if we don't do them for the right reasons, how is that pleasing to God? God wants our sincere worship to translate into sincere living. He doesn't want us to act one way here on Sunday morning and then another way among our friends Monday through Saturday. David put it this way. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (**Psalm 51:17**).

Besides acting justly, God also wants just reactions from us. That's why God went on to say, "love mercy." To love mercy is to ask us to be forgiving and patient even when someone doesn't act justly towards us. That's a hard ask, especially in this day of instant communication. That nasty notification comes up about a post from someone you do not like. How tempting to fire off a comment that's equally nasty. But if we do, we have to ask what we've really accomplished? Did we show mercy or did we merely stir the pot and cause more pain.

But Pastor Amy, what should I do if someone says or does something that hurts me? One option would be to do nothing. But if that isn't possible, then give yourself time to relax and calm down. That whole count to ten thing. Think about it before you react. It's way too easy to say things on social media that you will regret. Once you've calmed down go back and look at the entire thread. Give yourself a chance to process what's been said. See if there's a way to put a better construction on it. Consider the possibility that you misunderstood what was said. But if it truly was not a misunderstanding, then what to do next? To which I add, What do you think Jesus would say?

Forgive. Forgive completely and forgive unconditionally as Christ has forgiven you for all of your senseless comments. And that's not all, because now you're ready to respond to the other person. But your purpose shouldn't be to tell that person off. Instead, and in the most gentle and Christ-like way possible, try to show them that what they did or said hurt you. There are private messages for that. Whether they ever admit it or not, you will most likely find that the other person never intended for their words to hurt you. Perhaps they might even apologize for what was said. But even if they don't apologize what is our task? Remain forgiving. Why? Because God has called us to love mercy, not vengeance.

Are you beginning to see how we don't act justly and love mercy as we should? That knowledge will lead us to the third thing God wants from us - to walk humbly with God. Pride in oneself is not becoming of a follower of Christ. But it's easy to cross the line from being proud of something to having pride. Pride makes it very hard to be humble. If you're having a hard time being humble then perhaps its time to open your eyes and see that like everyone else you are a wretched sinner. All have sinned and fallen short of the salvation of God.

We have been invited to walk with God, and that should tell you something. Because of Jesus when God looks at us, God doesn't see sinners. Nope, God sees people who are redeemed. By the grace of God all of us in this room are redeemed. How do I know this? Just look at today's scripture. What the Israelites sarcastically suggested doing to remove their sins, up to sacrificing their firstborn, is what God did to take away our sins.

God sacrificed his Son on the cross to take away the sins of the world. Whether you believe that or not doesn't change the fact that you are forgiven, but it does determine whether or not you'll enjoy the benefits of forgiveness.

What does the Lord want from us? Nothing. He's already done everything. God isn't like that impossible boss or teacher; God is a loving Father who graciously provided salvation for us. That knowledge should lead us to stop muttering, "What does the Lord want from me" and gratefully ask, "What can I do for you Lord?" What can we do to show our thanks? Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. We are to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Say that with me.

God is putting us together piece by piece. Pieces of justice, pieces of mercy, pieces of humility all being knit together. And I for one can't wait to see what we become when we're fully assembled! Let us pray.