

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
4th Sunday after Epiphany
30 January 2011
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita
Micah 6:1-8; Matthew 5:1-12

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

The scene is a courtroom—

The jury's composed of mountains and hills, ancient rivers, and the foundations of earth.
(They were here long before you...)

The defendant, the accused party is ancient Israel—
the people of God,
you.

You are in the courtroom and *you* are being charged.
The plaintiff, the accuser, is Yahweh of Hosts—the Lord Himself.

You're called to speak your own case.

Tell the Lord exactly why you did what you did—
defend yourself.

Why are you unfaithful?

Why do you lie?

Why do you treat your kids poorly?

Why don't you listen and obey?

Why do you make excuses, brag about how good you've done, and how much you've given?

Why do you make yourself look good and put others down?

Why do you care to gain favor in this world?

This is the scene—

you're in a courtroom.

You can't lie in the courtroom.

You can't make excuses or blame another.

Where's your proof? Where's your argument? Where's your defense?

That's the scene we get from the Prophet Micah—

that's the scene we often get from the prophets.

They're good at saying it like it is—

there's no beating around the bush with the prophets.

Do you remember the Prophet Balaam? (He came up in our Old Testament reading today.)

He's normally not as well known as his donkey—

who, when seeing the angel with his drawn sword, veers off to the right and to the left, trying to protect his master, Balaam.

And when Balaam gets sick of being run into the walls, he finally strikes his poor donkey with his rod, and curses him.

And so the donkey *speaks* to Balaam—

at this point you might wonder who's the Prophet and
who's the ass?

But Balaam was more than simply a dumb prophet—

he was summoned by King Balak, king of Moab, to curse the people of Israel.

But when he went, he saw that Yahweh had blessed the people, so he said,

“Must I not take care to speak what Yahweh puts in my mouth?” (Num 23:12)

and again,

“All that Yahweh says, that I must do.” (Num 23:26)

and once more,

“If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I wouldn’t be able to go beyond the word of Yahweh, to do either good or bad of my own will. What Yahweh speaks, that will I speak?” (Num 24:13)

The Prophet can only say what Yahweh, the God of Israel, gives him to say.

Micah, can only say what Yahweh has given him to say—

and what he says, is that you’re on trial.

You’re the accused,

you’re the guilty,

you’re the one without defense.

And so Micah cries out:

“Hear what Yahweh says... Yahweh has an indictment against His people, and He will accuse Israel” (Micah 6:1,2).

But then the scene changes—.

Rather than telling Israel all their sins and recounting all their deeds

(do you notice that they’re not even mentioned in this reading?),

Yahweh Himself starts pleading to Israel and asking what wrong *Yahweh* has done—

“O My people, what have I done to you?

How have I wearied you?” (6:3)

Then, Yahweh goes into the many blessings and gifts He’s given to His people—

“For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,

redeemed you from the house of slavery,

I sent you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam [*Prophets of My Word*]” (6:4).

The Lord, Yahweh of Hosts, God our Father, *pleads* with Israel.

He cannot stand to simply be the accuser—

He doesn’t enjoy passing out judgments and punishments—

The Lord hates sin and hates for its punishment to fall on *you*.

But we’re quick to forget this compassionate Lord.

In our sin, we forget what the Lord is like.

And when we forget, we imagine Him to be like other lords,

to do what other lords do and desire what other lords desire—

And by other lords, I mean earthly lords, what we would want if *we* were lord—.

We'd want great and tremendous sacrifices,
 costly pearls, expensive garments, great self-sacrifices.
 We'd act in power, terror, and might,
 coming down in strict judgment, full justice, and severe anger.
 If we were wronged, we'd demand a sacrifice equal or greater to the sin committed.

And so as Micah reports Israel's response, we see that Israel thinks of Yahweh like other lords, and worse!

**“With what shall I come before Yahweh,
 with what shall I bow myself before God on high?
 Shall I come with burnt offerings, calves a year old?
 Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil?
 Shall I give my firstborn son,
 shall I give the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”** (6:7)

When the Prophet Micah hears this he shakes his head.
 He thinks to himself, “Why do they think of Yahweh as other lords?”

And so Micah responds,
**“He's told you, O man, that which is good;
 He's told you what He requires:
 To do justice, love mercy, and walk wisely and humbly with Him”** (6:8).

But this isn't any good news if Israel is expected to accomplish it.
 This doesn't free their burden or get them off the seat of accusation and trial.

Rather, if this is something Israel is expected to do—
 the burden gets heavier, weightier, and will kill them.

Who can do justice?
 Who loves mercy?
 Who walks wisely and humbly with their Lord?

So it is that Israel needs a defendant—
 they need an advocate, a good lawyer,
 someone that will plead their case for them.

They need someone who loves justice and mercy and walks humbly with the Father.
 They need someone who is **“poor in Spirit,”**
 who **“mourns,”** and is **“meek,”**
 who **“hungers and thirsts for righteousness,”**
“the merciful,”
“the pure in heart,”
“the peacemaker;”
 they need someone who is **“persecuted for righteousness' sake”** (Mt 5:1-10).
 They need Jesus—the very Son of God and Son of Man, the Lord of Hosts Himself.

It's with this Jesus that you find out that the Lord isn't like other lords—
that He doesn't do like other lords do or desire what other lords desire.

He desires simply to give and bless and heal and save.

He gives Himself in humility,
as the one accused,
as the one who stands in the stead of His people,
as the “poor, meek, hungry, thirsty, merciful, pure, peaceful, and the persecuted.”
He desires justice, mercy, and community—
He seeks walking partners, someone who will walk wisely and humbly with Him.

This Jesus isn't like other lords.

Rather than demanding great sacrifice and payment for sin,
He seeks to give Himself for that payment, that sacrifice.

Rather than putting the burden on you,
He takes it for Himself.

Rather than crush you and hold you as the guilty,
He seeks to be crushed and bruised and beaten and persecuted and guilty, *for you*.

This Jesus isn't like other lords—

He loves you.
He pleads your case.
He stands before you and with you and for your sake.

He does justice; *He* loves mercy; *He* walks humbly with His God—
for you.

So who can help, but to now do the same?

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit