



**Liturgical Day:** Christ the King Sunday  
**Date:** November 22, 2009  
**Sermon Title:** Justice, Kindness, Humility

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

It has been an exciting week for us here at Saint Peter. "The Bible in 90 Days" readers have finally made it to the New Testament. Today we begin our reading in Matthew 26, and what a relief! I was really having to push myself to stay on schedule with the Old Testament readings. There were a few days when I had to force myself to finish the assignment. But now that we're in the New Testament, I'm actually running a day ahead. It's been a lot of fun the past couple of days – and I'm really looking forward to the final few weeks.

I was tempted to preach on the New Testament, of course, since we arrived here on Thursday. For those of you who are keeping score: I haven't preached on a New Testament text since August – my last sermon based on a New Testament text was twelve weeks ago. Twenty-five years of ministry, and I've never been able to say that before! But we're staying with the Prophet Micah today – one of the last few books of the Hebrew Bible. We're staying with that text, because it really is a transition text in our Bible. Its message is rooted in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets, but it begins to communicate an important part of the message that Jesus will bring to God's people.

In Micah's day, it seems that the people of Israel had turned away from God, and had begun to place their hope in their own hands. They had horses and chariots and walled cities and even an idol or two. They began to imagine that these were the forces that could keep them safe from their enemies. Even though they had been commanded to trust only in God, they found it easier to trust in their own military strength.

What is surprising, when we study Micah, is to see what happened when they realize the error of their ways. It is evident in today's text. They start to imagine how to appease God. They suggest a variety of sacrifices that could be made: burnt offerings of animals – young calves and thousands of rams; volumes and volumes of oil; it is even suggested to sacrifice a firstborn child or two. Israel knows that they have sinned, and to try and make up for it, they imagine all sorts of religious observances. In some respects, that has been the Old Testament story. The people, once found sinful, were on their own to offer up something to God that would make it right again. And so even in the best of times, the people of the Hebrew Bible were focused on which religious ceremonies they could perform to put themselves right with God.

Truth is: we are tempted to do that today as well. On some level, we know that God is calling us to a deeper faithfulness. We know that to be disciples of our Lord means to strive for a richer prayer life, a more passionate devotional life, a stronger commitment to financial generosity and community service. It is tempting to respond to that knowledge by joining a ministry team, by taking solace in the fact that we show up for Sunday morning worship, or by comparing ourselves with those who never end up in church at all. But when we do so, we are reminded (just as Israel was) that this isn't what God is after. God didn't want the religious behaviors of the people in Micah's day, and doesn't want our religious behaviors today either. Joining ministry teams, participating in activities and giving money is not what God's is after. God wants us to join ministry teams, to participate in activities and to give, in the hopes that those involvements will take hold of our hearts, and transform us. God isn't interested in behaviors. God is interested in hearts. God wants to make us into new people. God wants to shower us with grace, transform our

LESSONS:

DANIEL 7:9-10, 13-14

PSALM 93 (2)

REVELATION 1:4B-8

JOHN 18:33-37

SEMICONTINUOUS SERIES

2 SAMUEL 23:1-7

PSALM 132:1-12 [13-18] (9)

BIBLE IN 90 DAYS READING

MICAH 6:1-8

PRAYER OF THE DAY

ALMIGHTY AND EVER-LIVING  
GOD, YOU ANOINTED YOUR  
BELOVED SON TO BE PRIEST  
AND SOVEREIGN FOREVER.

GRANT THAT ALL THE  
PEOPLE OF THE EARTH, NOW  
DIVIDED BY THE POWER OF  
SIN, MAY BE UNITED BY THE  
GLORIOUS AND GENTLE RULE  
OF JESUS CHRIST, OUR  
SAVIOR AND LORD, WHO  
LIVES AND REIGNS WITH YOU  
AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE  
GOD, NOW AND FOREVER.

AMEN.

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**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

minds, and call us to an entirely new way of living.

That's where the last words in today's first lesson come in. The message God gave to Israel is the same message God gives to us through Jesus. The essence a faithful life doesn't have to do with religious behaviors. It has to do with having a faithful heart. And what is the definition of a faithful heart? It is one that works for justice. It is one that loves performing acts of kindness. It is one that is permeated by a deep humility. That's what a faithful heart looks like. That's what Micah called his listeners to pursue. And that, ultimately, that is one of the central concerns of Jesus in the Gospels that we have just begun reading this week. Micah and Jesus agree: faithfulness to God has to do with lives that are shaped by justice, kindness and humility.

That said, I'm convinced that these three values are in short supply these days. Self-preservation, fierce opposition to opponents, determination: these are the virtues that people honor in our time. We teach them to our children. We elect leaders who aspire to them. We organize our political and social and economic structures around them. You need them to survive in the business world. And in such a context, there is little room for justice or kindness or humility.

Yet those of us who call ourselves Christians are called to march to the beat of a different drummer. That's what this particular Sunday in the church year is all about. It is Christ the King Sunday. On this day – the last Sunday in every church year – we consider what it means to have a crucified King. As loyal subjects of this King, we live with one foot in the kingdom of this world, where competition and fierce determination reign. But at the same time we hold our primary citizenship in the kingdom of heaven, where the first are last, where the meek inherit the earth, and where justice, kindness and humility are honored above all else. Christ the King Sunday is a day when we Christians remember that our King is not like earthly kings. This King calls us to an entirely different way to live; a way that looks upside down to the rest of the world.

That's why when Micah speaks, I don't hear him speaking to ancient Israel, or to someone else, a safe distance away from me. I hear him speaking to you and me. Calling us to do justice. Calling us to love kindness. Calling us to be humble before God and before others.

So we pray that the Holy Spirit will grace us, transform us, and reform us to be people of justice, kindness, and humility. And we give thanks for those glimpses we have from time to time that this is indeed taking place. When the world responds overwhelmingly to a natural disaster; when our own High School group takes as their primary focus a life of service to God; when our support of organizations like Selian Hospital and Lutheran Family Services becomes a lifeline for those whose needs are so great; in these moments we see how God continues to work on us – refusing to ever give up on us – continuing to hammer on the hardness of our hearts. In these moments, we get a glimpse of what it means to live as subjects of Christ the King. What it means to be committed to justice and kindness and humility.

Someone gave me this Bible a couple of years ago. It is an interesting Bible: handed out by FDR to soldiers in World War II, but similar to the one that was given to American soldiers during World War I. In 1917, when American troops were preparing to sail across the seas in order to take to the battlefields of France and Belgium, the New York Bible Society asked former president Theodore Roosevelt to inscribe a message in these pocket New Testaments, so that all American soldiers could carry one with them. Roosevelt happily complied. And he began by quoting Micah's call for justice, kindness, and humility: what Roosevelt called the "Micah Mandate."

Roosevelt said: "The whole teaching of the New Testament" is actually "foreshadowed in Micah's verse... Remember: the most perfect machinery of government will not keep us as a nation from destruction if there is not within us a soul. No abounding of material prosperity shall avail us if our spiritual senses atrophy. The foes of our own household will surely prevail against us unless there be in our people an inner life which finds its outward expression in a morality like unto that preached by the seers and prophets of God when the grandeur that was Greece and the glory that was Rome still lay in the future."<sup>i</sup>

Teddy Roosevelt obviously knew something about what it meant to live as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. And he inspired those who represented us in that first World War to do so with that in mind. A striking

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<sup>i</sup> Illustration gleaned from Homiletics magazine, January 2005, pages 40-41.

contrast with some of the stories we've heard in more recent conflicts. But as much as the world may have changed since 1917, God's call to us hasn't. We still are commanded to *do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with... God.*

We pray today that even in those moments when our instinct is to shrink from the task, that God will inspire us and empower us, and work through us to see that justice is done; that kindness does happen; and that we walk in God's presence with great humility.

Amen, come Holy Spirit. Amen, come Holy Spirit.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (November 22, 2009)

### Gospel Lesson; English Text: <sup>ii</sup>

<sup>18:33</sup> Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" <sup>35</sup> Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" <sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." <sup>37</sup> Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." <sup>iii</sup>

### Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:

<sup>18:33</sup> Εἰσῆλθεν οὖν πάλιν εἰς τὸ πραιτώριον ὁ Πιλάτος καὶ ἐφώνησεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· σὺ εἶ ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων; <sup>34</sup> ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς· ἀπὸ σεαυτοῦ σὺ τοῦτο λέγεις ἄλλοι εἶπον σοι περὶ ἐμοῦ; <sup>35</sup> ἀπεκρίθη ὁ Πιλάτος· μήτι ἐγὼ Ἰουδαῖος εἰμι; τὸ ἔθνος τὸ σὸν καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς παρέδωκαν σε ἐμοί· τί ἐποίησας; <sup>36</sup> ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς· ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου· εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἦν ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ, οἱ ὑπηρέται οἱ ἐμοὶ ἠγωνίζοντο [ἀν] ἵνα μὴ παραδοθῶ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις· νῦν δὲ ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐντεῦθεν. <sup>37</sup> εἶπεν οὖν αὐτῷ ὁ Πιλάτος· οὐκοῦν βασιλεὺς εἶ σὺ; ἀπεκρίθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς· σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεὺς εἰμι. ἐγὼ εἰς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ἐλήλυθα εἰς τὸν κόσμον, ἵνα μαρτυρήσω τῇ ἀληθείᾳ· πᾶς ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἀκούει μου τῆς φωνῆς. <sup>iv</sup>

<sup>ii</sup> A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>

<sup>iii</sup> St. John 18:33-37, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

<sup>iv</sup> St. John 18:33-37, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).

**“The Bible in 90 Days” Lesson:**

<sup>6:1</sup> Hear what the Lord says: “Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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.”

<sup>6</sup> “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? <sup>7</sup> 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?” <sup>8</sup> 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?” <sup>v</sup>

**Scheduled Readings for  
“The Bible in 90 Days”  
9/13/2009 - 12/12/2009**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Begin Reading At</u>	<u>Sermon Based On</u>
9/13	Genesis 1:1	Genesis 1:1-19
9/20	Leviticus 1:1	Exodus 16:2-15
9/27	Deuteronomy 23:12	Deuteronomy 6:1-9
10/4	1 Samuel 28:20	Joshua 24:1-3, 14-18
10/11	1 Chronicles 1:1	1 Kings 3:5-12
10/18	Nehemiah 13:15	Nehemiah 1:4-11a
10/25	Psalms 89:14	Job 38:1-11
11/1	Isaiah 14:1	Psalms 104:24-34, 35b
11/8	Jeremiah 33:23	Isaiah 25:6-9
11/15	Daniel 9:1	Ezekiel 2:1-5
11/22	Matthew 26:57	Micah 6:1-8
11/29	Acts 6:8	John 20:19-31
12/6	Hebrews 1:1	Romans 5:1-11

<sup>v</sup> Micah 6:1-8, New Revised Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).