

**February 2, 2020**  
**“Recipes for Blessing”**  
**Micah 6:1-8 & Matthew 5:1-12**  
**Pastor Tim Emmett-Rardin**

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Irish teacher and poet John O'Donohue writes as an introduction to his book of blessings, *To Bless the Space Between Us*: “A blessing evokes a privileged intimacy. It touches that tender membrane where the human heart cries out to its divine ground. . . . A blessing is not a sentiment or a question; it is a gracious invocation where the human heart pleads with the divine heart.”

We get a couple of heavy hitters in the lectionary this morning. The kind of texts that jump off the page. That you hear again and again if you spend much time in most any church. And that you remember.

“God 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?”

And from Matthew, Jesus' first extended teaching, the so-called “Sermon on the Mount” (again, noting here the parallels with Moses we talked about a couple of weeks ago). A sermon that begins with the beatitudes, the supreme blessings. The “Blessed are . . . ” litany.

If you're looking for a quick synopsis, a cheat sheet, of the Biblical witness, a clear and compelling standard for how we are called to be in the world—from the prophets to Jesus to the early apostles—you can't do much better than these two texts.

Micah is one of the four prophets operating during the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE—along with Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. He himself was a member of the working class, the laboring class, and his general message focuses on the corruption of political and religious officials and their exploitation of the people. He defends poor shepherds and farmers and families whose lands are being stolen from them. He rails against social and economic injustice, proclaiming that religious observance without justice is meaningless.

Chapter 2: “They covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away; they oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance.”

Chapter 3: "Listen, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Should you not know justice? – you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin off my people, and the flesh off their bones; who eat the flesh of my people, flay their skin off them, break their bones in pieces, and chop them up like meat in a kettle, like fish in a caldron." Micah does not mess around!

In Chapter 4 he reminds the people what the world might look like if they actually lived according to God's ways and God's paths, offering a vision of widespread peace: "God shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they study war any more." Where there is justice there is peace.

When we get to chapter 6, Micah casts himself as the lead attorney in a "covenant lawsuit"—representing God as the plaintiff and the people (and particularly their leaders) collectively as defendants for having violated the covenant.

The first two verses summon the natural world as witnesses: "Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. . . . for the LORD has a controversy with the people . . . "

In verses 3-5 God makes God's case: "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!" In other words, what I have done to you that you have turned against me and my ways?

In verses 6-7 we hear from the defendant, desperate to make it right with pleading questions: "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?" Burnt offerings? Thousands of rams? Ten thousands of rivers of oil? My firstborn, "the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

The answer to those questions, of course, is a resounding NO! Verse 8 is Micah's closing argument, an appeal to return to the divine heart, the divine ground: "God has told you, O mortal, what is good . . . " DO JUSTICE. LOVE KINDNESS. WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD. God has already told you what is good. God has already shown what is good. How

goodness leads to goodness. How justice leads to justice. How peace leads to peace.  
How blessing leads to blessing.

With the beatitudes, Jesus drives the point home—locating blessing in ways of being and acting that run contrary to the corrupt ways of the world. Locating blessing in ways that connect and reconnect us to the divine heart. To the divine ground. In ourselves, and in each other.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit”

“Blessed are those who mourn”

“Blessed are the meek”

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” – in other words, as if their lives depended on it!

“Blessed are the merciful”

“Blessed are the pure in heart”

“Blessed are the peacemakers”

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake”

These are recipes for blessing, but as Barbara Brown Taylor points out, “The language of the Beatitudes is not transactional language - do this and you will receive this . . . it is not the language of the law but of gospel, the language of hope and promise that the way things are now are is not the way they will always be.”

The Beatitudes are assurances that blessing is built into the divine heart, the divine ground, the divine intention. Blessing inspires blessing. Blessing follows blessing. Participate in blessing, be blessing, offer blessing, keep your hearts open to see and receive blessing, and blessing will find its way back to you.

God has told you, O mortal, what is good.

“For theirs is the kin-dom of heaven”

“For they will be comforted”

“For they will inherit the earth”

“For they will be filled”

“For they will receive mercy”

“For they will see God”

“For they will be called children of God”

“When we bless,” O’Donohue writes, “we are enabled somehow to go beyond our present frontiers and reach into the source. A blessing awakens future wholeness . . . a blessing ‘forebrightens’ the way.”

He goes on: “In the parched deserts of postmodernity a blessing can be like the discovery of a fresh well. It would be lovely if we could rediscover our power to bless one another . . . When a blessing is invoked, it changes the atmosphere. Some of the plenitude flows into our hearts from the invisible neighborhood of loving kindness. In the light and reverence of blessing, a person or situation becomes illuminated in a completely new way. In a dead wall a new window opens, in dense darkness a path starts to glimmer, and into a broken heart healing falls like morning dew.

“It is ironic that so often we continue to live like paupers though our inheritance of spirit is so vast. The quiet eternal that dwells in our souls is silent and subtle; in the activity of blessing it emerges to embrace and nurture us. Let us begin to learn how to bless one another. Whenever you give a blessing, a blessing returns to enfold you.”

God has told us and shown us what is good. Jesus has told us and shown us what is blessed. May we go and do likewise.

May it be so.