

## Reflection for Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022

Texts: Micah 6:6-8 and John 14:15–24

Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022

Place: MUC

### Introduction

Just for those who have joined us recently, the observance of a Day of Mourning was endorsed by the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia at the request of our sisters and brothers in the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC). In the spirit of our Covenant relationship with the UAICC, we have declared the Sunday before Australia Day as a Day of Mourning.

I have chosen Micah 6:6-8 and John 14:15-24

The prophet Micah asks a crucial question in the midst of injustice and violence in 8<sup>th</sup>-century B.C.E. Judean society: ***“What does God expect of you?”*** This is the key question for the people of Israel, who must come before God when the relationship with their God has been broken. This is also a question that we must ask ourselves today as we are invited to the observance of a Day of Mourning. The answer is clear: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8). As Micah invites his people, so we, the second peoples are also invited to answer Micah’s question: ***“What does God expect of us?”***

### The text in its context.

This passage is called a “prophetic covenant lawsuit” in which Micah addresses the broken relationship between God and the people of ancient Israel. The text presents Micah’s observation of violence and injustice in the 8<sup>th</sup>-century Judean society.

Micah paints a picture of political oppression and economic exploitation by the powerful against the weak and oppressed (6:12), and how they despise justice and distort the right (3:1-3). The structure of the passage, as a result, demonstrates that Micah invites the people of Israel to restore and reconcile the broken relationship with God and with the neighbour.

***What does God expect of you?*** Instead of “material commodity,” God wants faithful relationships and reliable solidarity. The two commands in verse 8, doing justice and loving kindness, stand at the centre of Israel’s faith-talk.

The first command concerns the love of neighbour.

The second command concerns the love of God.

So Micah’s first two commandments summarize the whole message of the Old Testament (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5) and reverberate in the Great Commandment of Jesus in the New Testament (Mark 12:28-31; Matt. 22:37-40).

The third command is to walk humbly. The term “humbly” could be misleading because it may refer to “self-abasement.” Micah does not invite the people of Israel to self-abasement. To walk humbly is the opposite of walking proudly or walking self-righteously, including arrogance, self-sufficiency, autonomy, and independence.

Walter Bruggeman suggests that the term “walking humbly” is to pay attention to others. In this way, the command to walk humbly is the journey of self-giving, self-sacrificing, and self-emptying. If we walk humbly, then we acknowledge others who will be our companions along the way.

As Paulo Freire succinctly put it, “*oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights,*” and dehumanization is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human.

In contrast, the command to walk humbly will lead us to the restoration of God's image, and we all become agents of transformation in the world.

If we walk the path humbly we acknowledge who will be our companion along the way? Micah answers: "With your God." This companion is not just God's closeness to us, but it carries along the way God's saving activities so that one can walk with the God who saves, reconciles, heals, and transforms.

**The text in our context** What does God expect of us today? The passage from Micah challenges us to know what God wants from us.

I hate to disappoint some of you. Worship is fundamentally not about you and me. It's not about meeting our needs or wants. Worship is not self-centred but God and other centred. It's certainly not about what we can get from worship. Too often worship is focused on the worshippers rather than the God of justice and love.

Worship is not so much about relevancy but reverence. What Micah stresses is that ritual worship alone is not enough; a journey of justice and reconciliation must be part of our worship. *"So, when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift."*

(Matt. 5:23,24)

When Jesus calls us to love our neighbour, the word "love" is not an emotional feeling but an action verb. In John 14:15: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

God calls us to do justice as part of our worship experience and our acts of justice should be part of our liturgy.

In his book, *Man Is Not Alone*, Abraham Joshua Heschel explained the mutual relationship

between worship experience and Micah's question, "What does God expect of you?" in the following way: Religion is for God's sake. Israel's focus is on their external religious rites, and their questions show a progression from lesser to greater.

**First**, they ask if God would be satisfied with burnt offerings of year-old calves ([Micah 6:6b](#)), offerings required in the Law of Moses.

**Second**, they ask if they should bring "thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil" ([Micah 6:7a](#)). This is the rhetoric of hyperbole; such an offering could only be made by someone extremely wealthy or by the larger community of God's people.

**Third**, they ask whether they should offer their firstborn sons as a sacrifice for God. Would that be enough to cover their sin? Would God be pleased with them then?

Never forget the human side of religion, its creeds, rituals, and institutions, is a way rather than the goal. The goal is 'to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God.' When the human side of religion becomes the goal, injustice becomes a way.

On this day of mourning, when we reflect upon and lament the effect of the invasion and colonisation of this nation upon First Peoples I think it's fair to ask "What does God expect of us as the Second Peoples?"

How do we walk with the First Peoples who continue to be discriminated and displaced? What does justice look like for the First Peoples?

Let's be clear, a LIFE of opportunity and dignity, free from discrimination and disadvantage, should not be an ideal. It is, in fact, a basic human right – one that we all share in common.

According to Dr. William Jonas, *“It is not possible to talk meaningfully about reconciliation, and the transformation of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians that it aims for, without reference to human rights .... The treatment of Indigenous peoples throughout Australia’s history has not respected these basic principles of humanity.”*

History of course tells us that seeking justice and transforming society are long and difficult processes. The struggle to change the shameful treatment of our First Peoples will be long and difficult – but it’s what Micah calls us to as God’s people.

If we’re serious about following the call of both Micah and Jesus – we need to do all we can to walk humbly with the First Peoples. The first step is for us to LISTEN to our First Peoples, to know the history of invasion and colonisation, their displacements and dispossessions, their pains and sufferings.

I want to close with a prayer, Written by Uncle Ray Minniecon known as ***The Redfern Prayer***. Ray is a descendant of the Kabi Kabi nation and the Gurang Gurang nation of South-East Queensland, and a descendant of the South Sea Islander people. He is a prominent Aboriginal Christian Leader in Australia with a long history working across Aboriginal justice issues through business and ministry. Please listen.

**God of our Dreaming.**

**Father of all our Aboriginal nations in Australia. You have lived among us since time immemorial. We have always known You.**

**You gave this land to our Aboriginal nations.**

**You have not dispossessed us nor destroyed us.**

**People from other lands, who do not understand our unique culture, our unique lifestyle and our unique heritage have come and destroyed much of our way of life.**

**Many of these people from other lands now want to understand and reconcile with us.**

**But for many of us Aboriginal people, we find this reconciliation business a little difficult.**

**Too many of our children are still in jails.**

**Too many of our children are still living in sub-standard housing.**

**Too many of our mothers are living on the streets or in refuges.**

**Too many of our children are still uneducated.**

**Too many of our children have no land and no community to go back to.**

**Too many of our children have not got good opportunities for good employment.**

**Too many of our children are living in extremely unhealthy environments.**

**Too many of our children are living among violence and abuse.**

**Too many of our children are dying to drugs and other soul-destroying substances.**

**God of our Dreaming and Creator of our people, we sometimes feel overwhelmed by these things. Many of us feel like we are refugees in our own land.**

**Today we are coming together again on one of our battlegrounds to cry out to You for mercy and justice for our children, for our families and for our land.**

**We pray that more resources will be given to our local community organisations to help us grow healthy and strong.**

**We pray that the peoples from other lands will be given a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone so that they can understand us and support us properly.**

**We pray that your Spirit will help and encourage us to grow good strong Aboriginal leaders.**

**Father we want to grow strong and healthy again in our own land. We want to take our rightful place in our land and make our contribution to the re-building of our families, our communities and our nation.**

**Please hear our cries for justice. We ask these mercies in the name of Your Son. Amen.**