

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
13 November 2022

10:30 a.m. MT Worship
23rd Sunday after Pentecost / Commitment Sunday

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

“The More Fully We Give, The More Fully We Live”

Fourth Sermon in the Five-Week Series: *Chronos & Kairos* (Part II of “Spirit of Curiosity”)

Micah 1:3-5; 5:2-5a; 6:6-8

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

I saw a cartoon this week with a couple in a grocery store check-out line. The woman’s face looks dismayed as she sees the cost of her groceries flashing up on the register. Her husband replies, *“With the cost of living going up on everything, aren’t we glad God hasn’t raised the tithe to 20%?”*



I chuckled because somebody asked me this week what the word tithe means. It’s a great question. Tithe is a fancy way of saying 10%. It is not a set amount of money, but rather a set percentage of your income. So when we read in Scripture¹ about the tithe or hear about it in church (and like any level of percentage giving), it’s meant to

be an equalizing opportunity – no matter how much or how little money you have. Which is encouraging in these tough economic times.

But actually, some places in Scripture tell us we should share all our belongings in common – we should give everything we have collectively to the community and then distribute to each as they have need.² 10% sounds a lot more doable when compared to 100%! Another favorite cartoon captures this:



It’s a picture of a chicken and a pig staring at a sign that says, *“Help feed the hungry.”* The chicken casually says, *“We should donate some ham and*

¹ Genesis 14:18-20, Numbers 18: 21, 24, Deuteronomy 14:22-27, Deuteronomy 14:28, 29

² Acts 2:44-45, Acts 4:35

eggs.” The pig replies, “[*Easy for you to say!*] *For you, it’s a contribution. For me, it would be a total sacrifice!*”

But my favorite stewardship humor comes from my late mentor, the Rev. Prof. Peter J. Gomes, who was famous for his brief, yet powerful, invitation to the offering every week: *“I have good news! God has already provided all the money we need to accomplish the church’s ministry this year. It is, however, still in your purses and pockets. The ushers will now come and receive your tithes and offerings.”*

Humor can remind us to have a posture of humility when we talk about stewardship and giving. That was certainly the case for me as a preacher this week. I’m not sure if it’s God, the Narrative Lectionary, or the Universe – but somebody has a sense of humor!

Because if you’re wondering, no, I did not *choose* a Scripture that seemingly says God does not want our offerings for the one Sunday a year when we make a really big deal about our offerings and walk them down to the front of the sanctuary! When I saw that *this* text was assigned on Commitment

Sunday, I thought, “*You have GOT to be kidding!*”

Don’t get me wrong, apart from the Greatest Commandment that says love God and love neighbor, Micah 6:8 is probably THE best succinct summary of what it means to live a life pleasing to God. But it wouldn’t hurt if there was a fourth phrase thrown in after “do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God.” Something like, I don’t know, “*Give generously to your church!*”

But alas, there is no such phrase in Micah 6:8. Not only is there no such phrase, but Micah reprimands the people’s desires to bring their offerings before God.

Yet, I’m still going to stand up here today and ask *you* to bring your offerings and financial commitments before God. Why?

Well, because my curiosity about this text landing on This Day led me to ask: what *does* our Giving have to do with our Living?

First, some background. The prophet Micah lived at the end of the 8th century BCE; his ministry spanned over 60 years. He witnessed the ongoing

assaults of the Assyrian empire against Israel and Judah, including the capture of Samaria (722 BCE) and the siege of Jerusalem (701 BCE).³

You could say that Micah had seen a few things in his day. “There had been a time of great prosperity that was immediately followed by a steep decline in the social and economic well-being of the people. The disparities in the life of the “upper class” and the “common person” were vast. There was internal political pressure from corrupt kings, untrustworthy spiritual leadership, and external political pressures from nations that wanted to invade and take advantage of people.”⁴ Everything seemed unstable. Sound familiar?

In chapter 1, Micah is connecting God’s distress and anger with the operations of the “places high up” – that is, the big cities – like Samaria and Jerusalem where spiritual and political leadership is corrupt. Micah, by the way, lives outside of these cities in the countryside

suburbs, and thus his vantage point allows him to see some things that those on the inside can’t see. A prophet’s job is, after all, to hold the people in power accountable; prophets were a counter voice to the kings and priests.

And the people put great hope in their kings. That’s why in chapter 5 we read about the hope of a new leader coming from a place called Bethlehem, a small town on the outskirts of power, not in the center of it. Micah 5:2 is actually the verse that Herod’s chief priests quote to Herod in Matthew, when Herod asks where the Messiah will be born.⁵ Bethlehem, they say. Now, we as Christians read this text as a prophecy of Jesus’ birth. Yet in Micah’s day, his people would have heard these promises in a much more immediate context. They wanted a king to bring them out of this treacherous time of turmoil and into a restorative time of peace and prosperity.⁶

Micah 5:2-5 kind of reads like an election campaign ad,

³ Cameron B.R. Howard, “Commentary on Micah [1:3-5]; 5:2-5a; 6:6-8,” *WorkingPreacher.org* (13 Nov. 2022), accessed on Nov. 10, 2022 at <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/micah-2/commentary-on-micah-13-5-52-5a-66-8-2>.

⁴ Morgan Phaneuf, “What does Micah 6:8 mean? Living out Justice, Kindness, and Humility in 2020,” *Emmaus*

Bible Ministries (22 Oct. 2020), accessed on Nov. 12, 2022 at <https://emmausbibleministries.org/blog/2020/10/21/what-does-micah-68-mean>.

⁵ Matthew 2:6

⁶ Howard, *ibid*.

doesn't it? Elect this person – who is of the finest stock, from a family you can trust – and all the wrongs of the world will be righted. The people were tired of suffering. They needed a Savior but didn't know it. So they set about trying to save themselves by negotiating with God.

Which brings us to Micah 6. Earlier in this chapter, in verses we did not read today, God asks the people: “*What have I done that have caused you to treat me like this? How have I wearied you?*”⁷ God is distressed. The people are desperate. And unfortunately, we humans seem to think that desperate times call for desperate measures. Through a series of questions, the people beg for clarity from God about how to get themselves out of their painful predicament.

They first ask: “*With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God?*” (Micah 6:6) This is like us asking, what should I write on my Commitment Card? It's a reasonable and right question, expected even.

And even their second question is fairly reasonable. It's their

honest attempt to answer their first question: “*Shall I come before God with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?*” (Micah 6:6) This is in line with the temple offerings of the day. Though not every person would be able to afford a calf, it's a reasonable answer given their context of Temple worship sacrifice.

But it's after this second question that things get ridiculous, and outlandish: “*Will God be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?*” (Micah 6:7) This is mocking God. It's hyperbole masking as humility. It would be like you writing on your Commitment Card – “*I'm going to give thousands of Teslas to Calvary*” – something that is not only unaffordable for any of us, but also impossible because of the sheer logistics of rounding up thousands of Teslas and getting them to 6500 E. Girard Ave. And then adding on top of that, “*Oh and I'm also going to give tens of thousands of mountains of snow.*” Micah's people couldn't drain rivers and fill them with olive oil and drag them to the Temple any more than we could move all the mountains of the world to

⁷ Micah 6:3

Calvary and command fresh, powdery snow to fall on their peaks! The people are offering up resources that are not theirs to offer, nor in their power to offer. They are proposing something that is impossible to give to God. It's preposterous. They are setting up God as the bad guy, since there's no way they could fulfill this demand.

And then, they move from the outlandish and impossible to the disgusting and displeasing:

"Shall I give the firstborn for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

(Micah 6:7) This is not what God wants from them and they know it. God has made it clear that God abhors child sacrifice.⁸

It shows just how desperate they are – how afraid and out of control they feel about their lives. It's like they are so mad at God they are giving up and saying, *"Nothing will be enough for God anyway, so why even try,"* while at the same time, in desperation trying to figure out will be THE THING that will finally make God happy, no matter how illogical and impossible that thing is.

Do you see what's happening here? The people are trying to think of what will *appease* God, instead of what will *please* God.

This is a spiritual temptation we all have, isn't it? How many of us have ever prayed: *"God, if you just get me out of this sticky situation, if you just heal my family member, if you just give me some kind of sign right now...then I promise...I'll never do such and such behavior again, I'll go to church every Sunday, I'll spend my life serving those in need."* Like it or not, we have probably all thought at some point in our faith journey that God could be placated. That if we do certain things a certain way, then God will answer our prayers in the way we want them to be answered. That if we do X, then God will do Y.

But God does not want to be appeased. God wants to be pleased. And this is where Micah 6:8 comes in as a powerful reminder for what we already know to be true: God does not want our grand, unrealistic intentions that we know we'll always fall short of. God wants our faithful actions

⁸ Shauna Hannan, "Commentary on Micah [1:3-5]; 5:2-5a; 6:6-8," *WorkingPreacher.org* (11 Nov. 2018), accessed on Nov. 10, 2022 at

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/micah-2/commentary-on-micah-13-5-52-5a-66-8>.

that are doable enough that we effect change. God wants our walk, not our talk. What God wants from us is an *attainable* way of life, not unattainable offerings or false promises.

“Don’t have a calf who is a year old?” No problem, Micah says. *“Don’t have access to thousands of rams and tens of thousands of rivers of oil?”* “No problem,” Micah says, *“nobody else does either.”* *“Don’t have children?”* “No problem; God wouldn’t want your firstborn even if you did.”⁹ The Good News is that what God desires from us is within our capacity to give no matter who we are or how much money we have. Doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God – these are things every single person can do. It’s not easy. Though we all *have* the power to do it, few if any of us will feel *empowered enough* by our faith and God to believe we can. But Micah is saying, *“Yes, you can. Yes, we can!”*

Micah 6:8 proclaims a new way of living for the people that is not about what they must *give up* but about all they have *to gain*. God wants us to live fully. And we live fully by doing

justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.

These three phrases encapsulate what we here at Calvary seek to do as beloved children of God who choose to join together in beloved community. That’s why we embrace the word Beloved as an identity, but also as a call to action – putting walk to our talk.

We are to BE LOVE...to be an action verb of love in the world; creating and enacting justice. This is what the Hebrew word, *mishpat*, means in the phrase “do justice.” We are to right the wrongs of this world. To look at what is unfair and make it fair. To emphasize equity over equality. *Mishpat* (“justice”) is God’s will for the world and it happens through *Doing*, Micah says, not *Discussing or Debating*.

We also talk about the word beloved by adding in that D at the end, saying we need to BE LOVED. We must allow ourselves to be cared for by others in community and to do the same for them. This is *hesed* in the Hebrew, to love kindness. *Hesed* is not just about being nice. *Hesed* is a deep,

⁹ Hannan, *ibid*.

covenantal relationality,¹⁰ such as that that committed partners have with each other¹¹ or that the people of God have with God.¹² *Hesed* requires intentionality in developing relationships and implies loyalty, love, and long-term commitment of care. Sounds like church, doesn't it?

Finally, when we talk about the word *Beloved*, we also isolate the word BE. Sometimes we are to BE in God's presence without producing anything for consumption or doing anything for others. We are simply to rest in the awe and wonder and beauty and presence of God. We are to let God be God and humbly remember that we are not. This is worship. This is meditation. This is silence. This is time in creation. This is whatever helps you center God in your life, rather than yourself.

And this is what Micah means when he says we are to "walk humbly with God." The Hebrew root here is *tsana*'. It's best defined as the opposite of pride, and coupled with the verb to walk – we get this idea of an active humility. Not a "slumped

down, woe is me, I am nobody" kind of humility. But a kind of humility that gives glory to God by letting love shine through our lives in palpable ways. While the verb BE might connote that to BE in the presence of God means we are relaxing and just chilling out in the sanctuary in a zen state of mind, the reality is, walking humbly with God in the Hebrew means "doing something very deliberately."¹³ Just as to BE in God's presence is a deliberate action/choice, so too, is to *tsana*', or to walk humbly. This is a daily practice, an hour by hour choice, a step by step journey.

So whether *mishpat*, *hesed*, and *tsana*' resonate with you as Micah's call for his people to live fully and faithfully before God, or whether breaking down the word BELOVED into three verbs – to BE LOVE, BE LOVED, and BE – resonates with you – the effect is the same. God desires for us to live lives fully devoted to God, community, neighbor, and self.

Burnt offerings, thousands of rams, and firstborn children – even IF we had them to offer –

¹⁰ Howard, *ibid*.

¹¹ Genesis 20:13

¹² Deuteronomy 7:9, Ruth 2:20

¹³ Rolf Jacobson, Joy J. Moore, and Kathryn Schifferdecker, "Narrative Lectionary 511: Micah -

November 13, 2022," *Working Preacher.org* (6 Nov. 2022), accessed on Nov. 10, 2022 at <https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/511-micah-nov-13-2022>.

they do not please God because they do not change how we live nor do they change how the world works. But doing justice, living in kind/covenant relationship with each other, and walking humbly before God – those things do.

So, to circle back to our original question, what exactly does our Giving have to do with our Living? Everything. Because I don't know about you, but I can't do these things on my own. I get distracted, overwhelmed, apathetic. Or I simply just don't know where to start. I need a church community to LIVE FULLY and that is why I GIVE FULLY to Calvary.

It's not about giving money for the sake of making God happy, it's giving money for the sake of making mission and ministry happen.

Here at Calvary, we support doing *mishpat* through ministries like Bootstraps & Blessings, Facing Racism, Family Promise, PRIDEfest, Kentucky Circle Village, New Baptist Covenant, Habitat for Humanity, and Colorado Faith Communities United to End Gun Violence. These ministries represent *Mishpat* (justice) in

Micah 6:8. They are how we BE LOVE in the world.

Just this past week at the Warming Ways of Winter auction – celebrating the 25th anniversary of Family Promise, we learned that Family Promise has helped 3,000+ families, 450 of those during the last two years of COVID. While other ministries were shutting down, Family Promise increased its ministry to meet the increased need. One mom shared her journey of not only finding housing through Family Promise, but getting clean, getting a job, and getting her children back. This is *mishpat*.

And think about this: When we show up week after week to Calvary, when we invest in the people here – we are creating covenant community. We are saying we *hesed* you – no matter how different you are from me, no matter how diverse our views, we are in community *with* each other and we care *for* one another. It's what we mean here at Calvary when we are vulnerable enough with each other to say, "*I need you. I need your casserole after my surgery, I need your ride to get my prescription. I need your listening ear and your prayers. I need your divergent viewpoint*"

and I need your respect.” This is what it means to allow ourselves to truly BE LOVED in a *hesed* kind of way.

And here at Calvary we come to this sanctuary week after week or we tune into worship online to BE in God’s presence. When we *tsana’* or walk humbly with God, we listen to Calvary’s MidWeek Devotions on YouTube and learn new spiritual practices, or we dial into the prayer line to pause and connect, or we go on retreat or grow our faith in Bible Study. What a beautiful, sacred space we have to BE! To *‘tsana!*

When you GIVE to Calvary, you are sustaining the place that allows you to LIVE out your faith in ways that are pleasing to God. We do not give to Calvary to appease God (or your pastors) with our offerings. We give to Calvary to please God because *This* is the place that helps us learn how to live full lives that honor God in word and deed – and that gives us a multitude of ministries and opportunities to do just that.

If you can do it on your own – good for you. But I’ve never met anyone who can. We need community. We need each other. We need a place where

we can challenge each other one minute, and care for each other the next. Where we can live into what it means to be in covenant, loyal relationship with each other – so that we are fully formed to be able to extend the love of God to the community and world around us. This formation cannot happen in isolation.

Today we celebrate Commitment Sunday and we process our gifts down to this offering box at the front of the sanctuary because Calvary needs YOU and ME to FULLY GIVE so that we can all FULLY LIVE beloved, faithful, Micah 6:8 lives.

And Calvary is a church that helps us do what the Lord requires, *mishpat*, *hesed*, and *‘tsana*. It’s not easy to find all of this in one place. But at Calvary, we strive for it even when we miss the mark. But rest assured – we are hitting the mark in many ways on many days...because of YOU!

Last week in our Connections Class, one new member said she appreciates Calvary because as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, in many places she can only show up as 25% of who she is, but at Calvary she

can be her full 100%. self.
Mishpat. Justice.

Another new member said she felt welcomed by two ladies who greeted her at the front doors, ushering her in to where she needed to be, welcoming her warmly, though she was dressed very differently than them and was decades younger. *Hesed*. Loving Kindness.

And yet another new member described Calvary as having the very best aspect of many different denominations and worship styles all wrapped up in one place: warmth and fellowship, hymns and liturgy, thoughtful sermons and personalized prayers...ritual in a relaxed way, he said. *Tsana*. Walking humbly with God.

And if these stories from our newest members aren't inspiring enough, remember...we don't just GIVE in order to LIVE for ourselves. We GIVE for our children and our children's children. What you commit to give to Calvary today has impact far beyond one calendar year. It's *chronos* money but it ensures that God's ministry continues for *kairos* time – creating glimpses of God's kingdom here on earth through Calvary.

So – what do you say? Won't you GIVE FULLY so that we can continue to have this place that helps us LIVE FULLY?

Amen.