



What God Requires



A Sermon By

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Grace Episcopal Church

Silver Spring, Maryland

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Micah 6:1-8
Psalm 15

1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Matthew 5:1-12

Eight days ago, at about this time, my mom, my wife, and I donned our hot pink pussy hats that a friend of my mom's had knitted for us. We checked to make sure the ears on each other's hats weren't crooked. Then we grabbed signs we had made earlier in the week, left our apartment and headed to the closest metro station. We were going to the Women's March on Washington. My mom had traveled all the way from Houston, Texas to participate in the march, and we were all excited.

We made our way to the closest commuter parking lot and were stunned to see hundreds of cars already parked and hundreds of people already making their way to the metro platform. We joined the surging throng and journeyed into the city. The crowd was unparalleled. A sea of people moving as one, rolling through the streets, the sidewalks, the barren flowerbeds, really anywhere that there was room to occupy. There were chants, there were songs, and there was a swarm of pink pussy hats. The crowd was double what the march planners had anticipated. Every single participant in the march possessed a passionate fervor and was there for a specific reason. It wasn't just a protest, it was a march. People were there marching for something.

Throughout the day we talked to many of the people around us and asked them why they were marching. Immigrant rights some said. Others said, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, Black Lives, sexual assault awareness. There were a host of reasons people descended upon Washington and other cities around the nation and the world. One of my favorite parts of the day was talking with folks, hearing their stories, and discovering their personal reasons for participating in the march. I was able to have conversations with a good number of people at the march and on the metro, but there were so many I didn't get to talk to. But I knew most of their reasons for marching nonetheless. They plastered them on signs, their banners of belief. Almost every other person in the crowd carried a sign boldly declaring his or her thoughts. We had signs too.

We made our signs a few days before the march. My mom had a list of sayings she had been thinking about for a while. She set about making her choice. I meanwhile, had no idea what I wanted to proclaim on my sign. But my wife, Sarah, knew almost instantly. She sat, poised with marker in hand, and jotted out her inspiration for marching. Six bold words: "do justice, love mercy, walk humbly."

These words are scripture. They are from the King James' translation of the last verse of our first reading this morning, in which the prophet Micah reminds the people what is good and what God requires of them. Sarah chose these words for her sign, her declaration, because for her, doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God means standing in solidarity with the threatened and with those who fear the denial of their human rights.

Micah also stood in solidarity with such people. The 8th century BCE prophet lived and preached in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. During his lifetime the kingdom experienced an economic revolution. The wealthy thrived at the expense of the peasants and an ever-widening gap between rich and poor grew exponentially. The common good was usurped by the personal self-interest of

the few. During this time, Micah's nation experienced radical political, economic, and social change.

In the midst of such vast changes, Micah stood out as a preacher of truth. He sought to expose injustice and inequality, to offer words of hope and salvation, and to make known a vision of a transformed way of life for his community. Micah called out the leaders of his day on their self-reliant attitudes and smug pride. He condemned the nation's break with covenant relationship, which led to grave injustices and much suffering among the people. Micah was someone who, to borrow a phrase from Jesus, hungered and thirsted for righteousness.

The people I encountered at last weekend's march hungered and thirsted for righteousness, for justice. The people protesting this weekend at our nation's airports do too. What about us? Do we hunger and thirst for righteousness, here and now? When injustices occur in our community, in our nation, do we take action or simply look the other way? Do we hunger and thirst for righteousness or do we just assume someone else will? Do we hunger and thirst for righteousness or do we explain away perceived indifference because we don't want people to think that we take sides? Do we hunger and thirst for righteousness or keep silent so as not to offend, not to disappoint? Do we like Micah, like Jesus, hunger and thirst for righteousness? Our God calls us to do so, time and time again.

Simply look at the rest of our scripture passage from Micah. At the beginning of our reading, there has been some sort of breach in relationship between God and God's people. God recounts the many ways God was present in the lives of the people, the ways God had saved them time after time. "I brought you up out of slavery. I redeemed you. I gave you leaders." God had to remind the people of God's presence with them. Then, they seemed to remember and asked God how they might thank God, how they should act in return for God's goodness. They suggest one-off sacrifices, beginning small with burnt offerings, and growing in scale to sacrificing their own children. But Micah, acting as the voice of God dismisses those ideas. God doesn't want a one-time offering, no matter how small or how grandiose. God wants ongoing action and relationship. Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God. This instruction demands an enduring self-offering. It's not about pounding the pavement in one march. It's not about writing a single check to a refugee organization. Those are good things, but we are called to more than periodical nods to equity.

God's catalyzing clarion call echoes to us through scripture, through the prophets, and through God's incarnate Word, Jesus. It's a call to continually hunger and thirst for righteousness, to continually do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. And friends, we must answer that call to engage deeply and enduringly in relationship with God and work together to promote justice and kindness in our world; because frankly, the world actively works against those things. It overrides them, sidelines them, monetizes them, limits them, and assumes that they are overrated and overstated. Now is the time to rise up, to heed the call of the prophets, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, and to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God; not once, not twice, but time and time again. He has told you, O mortal, what is good and what the Lord requires of you. Let's get to it. Amen.