

Ready or Not
Micah 6:1-8
January 29, 2017

Listen to what the Lord says: “Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. Hear, O mountains, the Lord’s accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the Lord has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. “My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord.” With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Do you remember the game of hide-and-seek we played as children. One person was “it” and everyone else would run and hide. The person who was “it” would cover his eyes, count to one hundred and call out “Ready or not, here I come.”

We are in the season of Epiphany. The emphasis of Epiphany is the revealing of Jesus as the Savior of all people, not just the Jewish people. However, today’s Old Testament reading leads us to think about the question, “As we live out our Christian lives, are we truly prepared for Jesus to return as the judge of all people?” This is the question Micah was asking God’s people of his day.

Jesus said he would return like a thief in the night. In other words, no one knows when that time will be. Therefore, the question Micah asked those Israelites is the question he is asking us today – are we ready to hear Jesus say, “Ready or not, here I come.” Let’s apply Micah’s words to our lives today.

God’s grace enables us to be ready for the future.

God opens his complaint against the Israelites with the question in verse three: *My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you?* (Mic 6:3 NIV). God wants to know why his people have treated him so poorly. Instead of offering thanksgiving for all the good things God had done for his people, the Israelites forgot God and engaged in idolatry, intermarried with pagan people, and broke all of the commandments God had set before them.

Next, God presents a few examples of times when he covered the people with his grace. After over 400 years of slavery, God rescued his people from Egyptian slavery with mighty miracles. As a grand finale, God parted the Red Sea to let his people cross in safety and to destroy Pharaoh’s army.

God engineered the life of Moses. He gave Moses the finest education possible in the court of Pharaoh. He gave Moses 40 years of desert training while he tended his father-in-law's sheep. Then, when Moses was fully prepared, God took Moses back to Egypt to bring the Israelites out to freedom.

When Balak, king of Moab, bribed Balaam to curse the Israelites, God protected his people by instructing Balaam what he would have him do. When Balaam decided to help king Balak anyway, the Angel of God stood in the road. Balaam's donkey saw the Angel and refused to take Balaam any farther and God's people were saved (Num 22).

God concluded his argument by reminding the people how he had given them Joshua to lead them into the promised land and conquer the promised land.

The grace God had shown the Israelites in the past was the foundation for them to believe his promises of grace for the future. God promised his people deliverance. Not just physical deliverance, but also spiritual deliverance.

Micah 2:12-13 *I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the Lord at their head.*

Micah 5:2 *But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.*

So, what about the grace that God has shown to us – his New Testament people? Can we look at our past and have hope for the future?

God's grace was showered down on us in our baptism. Through baptism God brought us into his family. We became his children. He became our Father. And faith, the gift of the Holy Spirit, became ours.

After our baptism, God continued to shower his grace on us through the teaching and preaching of his Word. Today, before we leave here, God will once again show us his grace in the body and blood of Jesus as we celebrate Holy Communion.

God has showered blessings on this church. Through the years, thousands of people have come here to worship. Lives have been changed in this very building. Children and adults have been taught God's Word. This church has stood, and still stands, as a beacon of God's love for the people of Farmington Hills.

God has been as good and faithful to us as he was to those Israelites of long ago. And, like those Israelites, because of God's grace in the past, we can trust God's promise of grace for the future.

Matthew 28:20 *Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

Romans 8:28 *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

John 14:1-3 *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

Our response indicates whether we are ready or not.

In Micah's time, God asked his people, "How will you respond to my grace?" God asks us the same question. Our response must be either positive or negative. If we compare our actions with those of the Israelites, we will find the answer.

A negative response says we are not ready for Jesus to return. The Israelites gave God a negative response. The Israelites had plunged themselves in religious ritual. They convinced themselves that God cared more about the things they did than the condition of their hearts and their faith.

Micah 6:6-7 *With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

That was Micah's day, but things weren't any better by the time Jesus walked the earth. The Jews of that day were still more interested in their tradition than their God. They told Jesus: *We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?* (Jn 8:33 NIV).

We cluck our tongues at these things. We accuse the Israelites of trying to bribe God with earthly offerings and earthly traditions. But we can fall into the same trap.

When we think that God is impressed by our formalism, our church attendance, and our carefully planned and orchestrated worship services, we might just as well sacrifice a few sheep and goats and brag about our proud Lutheran heritage.

If we are to make a positive response for all that God has done and will do for us, we must pay careful attention to the last verse of today's reading: *[God] has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God* (Mic 6:8 NIV).

This one command proved to be too much for the Israelites of old. Sadly, it is still beyond the grasp of most people today. To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God, is a huge command. Only with the help of God can someone

even try to live the life God expects from us.

To act justly means to lead godly lives. God wants us to be examples for the rest of the world. He wants purity, honesty, and integrity from us. He wants the unbelieving the world to feel his love radiating from us.

To love mercy is to be tolerant and forgiving. While we are never tolerant of evil, we can always be tolerant and forgiving with people who are stumbling around in the darkness of sin. We can always love the sinner, while we hate the sin. We can be tolerant and forgiving with our sisters and brothers in Christ, when they stumble; just as we want them to be tolerant and forgiving with us when we stumble.

To walk humbly with your God is to force pride and arrogance out of your life. It's to say with the apostle Paul: *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Ga 6:14 NIV).

Like the ancient Israelites, we need to be reminded not to take God's mercy and grace for granted. We need to do more than just go through the motions of faith. We need to embrace humility not pride. We must show mercy, not claim merit. We need to live by faith, not by sight. We need to boast only in Jesus, never in ourselves. We need to worship in sincerity, not pretense. We need to trust in the Lord, not in ourselves.

God's grace enables us to face the future and eternity with hope and joy, knowing we are ready for Jesus when he comes. If, today, Jesus says, "Ready or not, here I come," our answer will be: *Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Come.* (Re 22:20 NIV).