

“This Is a Day of New Beginnings, Time to Taste and Share What Love Can Do”

Second in a Four-Week Sermon Series

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Lent, Sunday, March 3, 2013

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Holy Scriptures: Micah 6: 6-8 Isaiah 55: 1-9

Micah 6

6 “With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

8 He 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?

Isaiah 55

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;

and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,

and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

3 Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,

my steadfast, sure love for David.

4 See, I made him a witness to the peoples,

a leader and commander for the peoples.

5 See, you shall call nations that you do not know,

and nations that do not know you shall run to you,

because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,

for he has glorified you.

6 Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near;

7 let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous
their thoughts;

let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on
them,

and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my
ways, says the Lord.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,

so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts
than your thoughts.

Sermon

*“In faith we gather round the table
to taste and share what love can do.
This is a day of new beginnings;
our God is making all things new.”*

Lyrics written by Brian Wren;

music created by Carlton Young;

faith experienced and expressed by Jesus Christ.

The prophets Micah and Isaiah, to name two,
appreciated the nuance of internally experiencing the love
of God
and then expressing it outwardly.

Isaiah celebrated the sensation of tasting and seeing the God is
good.

Isaiah joyfully proclaimed,

“Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;

and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!

2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,

and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me,

and eat what is good,

and delight yourselves in rich food.

3 Incline your ear, and come to me;

listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,

my steadfast, sure love for David.

*4 See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.*

*6 Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near... ”*

Micah asked the rhetorical question, “*What does the Lord require of you?*”

The answer is written in our hearts and emblazoned on our minds:
“*Do justice, ...love kindness, and ...walk humbly with your God.*”

Justice... Kindness... Spirituality...

All faith experiences,

all felt deeply and experienced wholeheartedly,

all ways of experiencing

the presence and tender mercies of God.

Do... Love... Walk humbly...

All actions,

all expressions of loving activity,

all within our reach and realm of possibility.

Experience the love of God, who loves you very much.

Taste and see that God is good;

listen and touch and sense the closeness of God's love for you and yours.

Only you can sense what you experience of the love of God.

No one can do it for you;

you can't inherit it from another generation;

you won't glean the goodness of God through osmosis.

Faith is experiential.

Taste what love can do.

See and hear and smell for yourself what love can do.

Touch and feel and live into what love can do.

Hopefully, prayerfully, faithfully the Church, the Body of Christ,

is the love of God with some skin on it,

present and available to serve, called and ready to share the Good News.

Faith is experiential,

and faith is meant to be expressed, shared, given away with joy and sincerity.

Faith is experiential,

learned and understood internally,

sensed from our nerve endings and processed in our hearts and minds.

The love of God which we have experienced firsthand

is a gift of God to be released, externally,

and expressed outwardly, freely and hopefully,

each of us in our own way.

All who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, express yourself!

Barbara Brown Taylor tells of her friend, Matilda, who died a few short years ago.

She had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, better known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

She gradually lost control of all her muscles.

Her face went first, then her vocal chords, then her legs.

For the last year of her life, she communicated by writing on a slate, one of those erasable things kids play with.

Sometimes she would get so excited

that she would write and erase faster than anyone could read.

Matilda found a lot to be excited about.

Watercolors, for instance.

When she could not talk anymore, she taught herself to paint,

 until her kitchen walls were papered with tulips, peonies,
daffodils, Hibiscus.

When you went to visit Matilda, you painted.

That was one of the rules.

It did not matter if you had no ability,

 even if the last time you held a paintbrush

 was to put a coat of latex on your bathroom wall.

Matilda stuck [a brush] in your hand,

 shoved a plastic egg container full of colors in front of you,
and you painted.

The best part was afterwards when she admired your work,

 sticking her thumb in the air

 and rewarding you with her loose, drooling grin.

Barbara recalls that, *“It was all I could do to watch her die.*

I wanted someone to walk into her room with a pill or a prayer

that would cure her illness or at least halt its progress,

but even if that had happened

 — *even if Jesus himself had showed up to call her from
the tomb --*

*she would have to die all over again, as
Lazarus did.*

*It would have been a rescue from death instead of triumph over it;
a resuscitation instead of a resurrection.”*

Something bigger than that was going on with Matilda.

Every time she lost something she thought she could not live without,
she found out she could.

First there was a painful void that lasted an hour, a day, a week.

Then something new moved in to fill the empty place:

a fresh series of paintings, a new friend, a deeper sense of the
presence of God.

“He is calling me,”

she wrote on her slate one day, *“like a bridegroom calling his
bride.”*

Her resurrection began before she died,

and everyone around her saw it.

When she set her cup down it was empty.

There was nothing wasted, nothing left to spill or lament.

She died clean as a whistle,

and several of the people who sat by her bed that day

say their fear of death died with her.

Having watched her do it, they believe they can do it, too.

We who have experienced God's love

are called and compelled to express love,

to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly,

practicing a humble spirituality.

A personal conviction of morality is learned in the practice of religion.

A passion for justice is taught in our classrooms,

expressed in our worship of the Holy,

and practiced in our missions and daily journey across life.

Empathy and compassion for the lost, the last and the least,

for the dispossessed and disinherited

are learned here, in Christ's Church.

We are witnesses...

we are participants...

we are living, moving testaments of the power of God

to work in and through people united for a common cause.

This, my friends, is who and whose we are.

Each day is a new journey,

a day of new beginnings, experiences and opportunities

to express what God is doing in and through you!

Consider our congregation's

Outreach Ministry's Mission Statement:

Resolved

*“to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God”
(Micah 6:8),*

we will spiritually and physically extend

the beliefs, respect, resources, and actions of the church

throughout the community

for the mutual enrichment and empowerment of all.

Simple. Pure. Pithy.

We who have been loved

are called to love.

We who have been served

are called to serve.

We who have had our turn at being first

are asked to slip toward the back of the line.

We who have been fed and had our thirst quenched at the Table of the Lord

are called to make room, to make an invitation, to make love real.

We who have benefited from justice and seen it from both sides

must now fight for the just treatment and rights

of our brothers and sisters in need.

We who have been invited to walk with God

are asked to do so humbly and honestly.

When Jimmy Carter was elected President in 1976,

the press wanted to interview his mother, Lillian Carter,

who was an amazing person in her own right (Peace Corps Volunteer, etc).

The press loved her because she was so quotable.

Lillian Carter had said: *“I love all my children, but some of them I don't like.”*

“Middle age is when a guy keeps turning off lights

for economical rather than romantic reasons.”

President Jimmy Carter, however, refused to allow the press to

Speak with her

until finally a compromise was reached.

The press agreed to only one reporter present, on Lillian's turf, in her home in Plains.

Jimmy said to his mother, "Please be careful."

She said, "*Oh, I will be.*"

When the reporter showed up she welcomed him into her home.

He asked her, "Has the President ever told a lie?"

"No."

"Never?"

"*Well, maybe a white lie.*"

"What is a white lie?"

"*For example, I told you a white lie when I said you were welcome in my home.*"

Now that, my friends, is faith experienced and expressed!

All power be to the Creator, the Son and the Holy Spirit! Amen!