

Autumn Evensong
October 14, 2018
The Rev. Deacon Nancy Casey Fulton
Micah 6:1-8

May my words be a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path.

I ask myself most days: “what is that path to be?” As deacon of this parish, I am called by my ordination vows to bring the needs and concerns of the world to the congregation. And, conversely, to bring the message of God’s love to the world. The most obvious way I fulfill this ministry is by shaping the Prayers of the People. And so, I watch the evening news most day, and I check CNN online when I am working at my desk. I don’t need to tell you that the news is mostly bad: the world is consumed in anger, hatred, violence, incivility, and so I am thankful for quiet respites.

One of my favorites is CBS’s Friday “feel good” story, “On the Road” with Steve Hartman, a reminder to me that good people do exist. People who know that the world is in sorry shape, but who are undaunted by that reality, helping their neighbors in ways that astonish me.

The world was an equally troubled place in the time of Micah, who lived in the 8th century before Christ. He believed, as did other Old Testament prophets, that the state of the world was the fault of the Lord’s people, and so he reminded his followers that the Lord had a “controversy” with them because they had forgotten the saving acts of old. They had forgotten the words of Hosea, whose ministry preceded and overlapped Micah’s for a few years (4:1-3). In the fourth chapter of his book, Hosea proclaimed that “the Lord has an indictment against the land. . . swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed upon bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing.”

And so Micah, to call the people to action, first hearkens back to the words of Hosea, reminding his listeners that God has a “controversy” with his people because they have not appreciated his deeds on their behalf, especially their release from slavery in Egypt.

Micah then admonishes the people not to take the easy way out to appease the Creator: they are not to present to God burnt-offerings, calves a year old, thousands of rams, tens of thousands of rivers of oil, or their first-born son, Those are the gifts of an outdated walk with the Lord.

Today, says Micah, they are to show their gratitude in a new way: they are to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with their God

I expect Micah’s listeners were confused by these words. And troubled, for it was in many ways easier to have a list of the sacrifices they must make to be in right relationship with their Lord. How were they to “Do justice? Love kindness? Walk humbly with their God?” What did that mean in a world that was tearing itself apart?

We ask that same question today. We live in a world that sorely needs justice, humility, openness to the presence of God. A world that needs us to sit quietly to hear God’s word to us. To offer ourselves in service to the weakest among us. To speak boldly of injustice, and to act against it.

Night is drawing in, the days growing shorter as earth prepares for its winter sleep. The earth is beautiful in this season, but it is also melancholy, reminding us that death comes to all of us, that the inevitable cycle of life and death will go on long after we have left this world. And so we gather for comfort. We light candles. We bask in the familiar words of this centuries-old service of Evening Prayer. This service that quiets our minds and our hearts as we contemplate our role in this ever-changing world given into our hands.

We give thanks and praise to God for many blessings. Hopefully we will leave this sanctuary with peaceful hearts. Hearts open to justice, mercy, and a humble walk with God.