

Life in the Kingdom

**Sermon notes for the sermon
given by Rev. Dr. Gregory Young
Presented on Sunday, January 30, 2011**

Each group or organization has its own particular identity and makes its own peculiar demands on its members. Each group or organization has its own set of expectations which help to shape its identity and define its reason for being. Today's scripture readings deal with identity and expectations for the people of God. They help us understand what life in the kingdom of God is like.

What does it mean to live in the kingdom of God? What is expected of those who choose to live in that kingdom? During the time of the prophet Micah the nation of Israel, the people of God, were face-to-face with desperate times. Their country, the Promised Land, was under siege. All that they knew, all that they cherished and loved and prized was coming to an end.

The people began to ask themselves and their leaders, "Is this punishment from God? What have we done wrong and how have we offended our God? Why was God doing or allowing such horrible things to happen to his own people? Each of us have experienced tough times and have found ourselves doubting in our faith and even in God to some extent. We have all grown through the pains, changes, challenges and frustrations of childhood and adolescence. We have had to live through experiences which have threatened to shatter the very peace of our lives and our families. We have had to bury too many loved ones and friends. We have had too many of our dreams shattered by the reality of life.

When Micah spoke to the children of Israel on God's behalf he was speaking to a people who felt cheated, abandoned, and left for

dead. They had come to rely on the fact that since they were God's chosen people they would live in security and prosperity, insulated from the uncertainty and struggle of life in this world. Through the upheaval of the Promised Land they had lost their sense of identity. They did not know who they were and if God even cared. Into this God's Word came to his people just as it had always come; through a messenger, Micah.

Micah, speaking at God's bidding, invited his people to plead their case before God and for all the people of the world to hear and see. God even told his people how to plead their case against him.

What must we do to appease the wrath of God? How can we make amends so that God's judgment will not destroy us? What shall we offer: burnt offerings; animal sacrifices; thousands of rams; rivers of oil; or even our first-born children? What shall we offer, what can we offer and how much should we offer to satisfy God's judgment against us?

The answer was given: God does not require burnt offerings or animal sacrifices or oil or even the death of our children. All God expects of his people is that they should live as his people. God expected Israel and expects us to live as his children embracing life in the kingdom and allowing the values and principles of the kingdom of God to shape who we are. Micah said to his people, "God has shown you 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.?"

As one writer has stated: "No new expectation are introduced with these words, just three requirements summarize the responsibilities of the nation and of individuals in the covenant relationship with God; all have to do with human activity in community and under God. "To do justice" concerns the establishment of law in the courts, the

care for the equity in all human relationships. "To love kindness" is to be faithful in covenant relationships to maintain solidarity with others, including those in need or trouble. "To walk humbly with your God" is not an additional expectation, but a summary of the others. It means to acknowledge the Lordship of God, to submit one's will to the will of God. Genuine piety is seen in doing justice and loving mercy."

Jesus had his own way of putting this same invitation to live in the kingdom. Life in the kingdom of God is a life that experiences blessedness as one serves others. The beatitudes cover every sorrow, pain, and suffering life has to offer. Jesus tells us that we live in the kingdom when our lives are torn apart in such ways and we experience the healing grace of God's presence through acts of mercy.

Frederick Buechner puts it this way: