



“We Cannot See the Future”

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Scripture (ERV):

Micah 3:5-12

⁵ Some false prophets are telling lies to the Lord’s people. This is what the Lord says about them: “These prophets are led by their stomachs. They promise peace for those who give them food, but they promise war to those who do not give them food.

⁶ “This is why it is like night for you and you don’t have visions. You cannot see what will happen in the future, so it is like darkness to you. The sun has gone down on the prophets.

They cannot see what will happen in the future, so it is like darkness to them.

⁷ The seers are ashamed.

The fortunetellers are embarrassed.

None of them will say anything, because God will not speak to them.”

⁸ But the Lord’s Spirit has filled me with power, goodness, and strength.

So I can tell Jacob about his crimes, and so I can tell Israel about his sins!

⁹ Leaders of Jacob and rulers of Israel, listen to me!

You hate the right way of living!

If something is straight, then you make it crooked!

¹⁰ You build Zion by murdering people.^[a]

You build Jerusalem by cheating people!

¹¹ The judges in Jerusalem accept bribes to help them decide who wins in court.

The priests in Jerusalem must be paid before they will teach the people.

People must pay the prophets before they will look into the future.

Then those leaders expect the Lord to help them.

They say, “The Lord lives here with us, so nothing bad will happen to us.”

¹² Leaders, because of you, Zion will be destroyed. It will become a plowed field. Jerusalem will become a pile of rocks.

Temple Mount will be an empty hill^[b] overgrown with bushes.

Sermon:

I don't think it can be much fun to be a prophet, not one like Micah, or Amos, or Jeremiah. They are grim people, sharing grim news. They shake their fists and shout because:

Leaders are corrupt. They make deals that make them rich, but do nothing to serve the people in need.

People are hungry and get no relief.

Courts are full of bribes, and so justice is perverted.

Cheating and stealing are rampant.

Religious spokespersons are ignorant and mutter foolishness, they say what others want to hear, not the truth.

They don't look for God, they don't search their hearts for the spirit of the Lord to give them wisdom to share with the people, instead, they are money hungry, power hungry hypocrites, sucking up to the rich and the powerful.

That's what Micah says and then, he sends out a word of doom... "your power will crumble, your cities will fall, it will be a wilderness and a desert out there.

You will not escape from God's anger".

O boy. Not a fun job.

Problem is...this job is still necessary. It is still necessary to shout and shake our fists. It is still an age of oppression and greed. We still have the hungry who can find no bread. We still have religious leaders who are self-serving and godless, and we still have corruption in our justice system.

The prophets believed that the leaders, the people, the kings who governed them...all of them had what they needed to live, to live well, to dwell secure. To enjoy God's love, to feel safe with one another.

They had Torah.

God's law for life.

They just refused to listen, to learn, to be humble, to be clear eyed about what God sought from them.

The ten commandments are Torah. The Great Commandment of Jesus: to love God and neighbor as yourself, comes from Torah.

Matthew 25 reflects the justice of God found in Torah.

These are the rules we seek to live by. These are the values we espouse. These are the words we are called to shout from the rooftops and go out onto the streets to protect and defend.

In every single copy of your bulletin, and every single month when our church newsletter, the Witness goes out, you have another opportunity to reflect on our chosen and self-identified church values...they are right there, on the back of the bulletin.

They are **spiritual nurture, and welcome. They are fellowship and service. They are progressive Christianity and sustainability.**

Inside your bulletin, you have a pretty little paper that is our “narrative budget”...words that we hope, explain how we spend our money, and how we need your money to help do the work we do at Westminster.

I want you to see that narrative reflects what our values are: so, **spiritual nurture**...is education of you and the kids, and care of the babies in the Activity room. It is worship and singing, piano and organ and prayer, and bible studies, and movie night discussions. It is youth going on a service trip, or children having a pajama party in the parlor. It is Ash Wednesday, and a Maundy Thursday supper, a baptism, a wedding, a funeral service. Spiritual nurture is at a PRIDE service, it is at a service for the murdered whether at the Pulse nightclub, or in Las Vegas. It is a wedding for a same sex couple who have waited twenty years for that joy and that blessing.

And also,

Woven into every part of that, is our **welcome**. So, the heat and the lights are always on when we gather. And our doors are open and the coffee and the food are shared with stranger and friend alike. John welcomes you. Andréa welcomes you into the office on weekdays. We welcome you if you are straight or gay or trans, or gender fluid. We welcome one another poor and not poor, sick and well, young and old. We welcome with birthday parties, and singing parties, and potlucks and talent shows. We welcome you to sit quietly in the back, or stand up front and testify to the power of God in your life.

And this,

Enriches our **fellowship**. Fellowship is a rather quaint word, but it is the **community** we build with one another. Learning patience and mercy and gentleness with our quirky companions in this faith community. Because to simply become a clique of like-minded persons is not what Jesus practiced or challenged us to do. We are to grow bigger of heart, more open of mind, gentler and less judgmental, open armed and generous.

And then,

Our **service**, comes out to others, with love and enthusiasm. So, it doesn't matter if we are collecting coats against the cold, or working to change the laws in our city by working with the Spokane Alliance. Whether we are protecting against abuse of our planet with Earth Ministry, or advocating for changes in gun laws through the Faith Action Network,...we come to serve out of a place of love and grace as God's gifts that we share with the world.

And then,

We will speak and learn of generous and welcoming ways to be Christians, followers of Jesus who do not stifle the breath of the Spirit, but look at the wonderful diversity of ways that God is at work in the fabulous diversity of our world...through us, through other people of faith, through good people of no faith at all. We are **progressive Christians**...finding our way to God through Jesus as our Teacher and Lord, but trusting in the greatness of God and seeing the beauty in all people and all faiths.

And then, lastly,

We strive to live **sustainably**. We want to continue to offer the blessing that is the faith community of Westminster, to our town and to our children and beyond. If Westminster were gone, there would be a huge hole in our city, and in our lives. So we strive to find the resources to continue: with coffee, and heat and light, warmth and shelter, and our values and our witness, to one another, to the city, to the Pacific Northwest Conference and into the greater world.

When you look at our narrative budget, use the lens of our values in which to see it.

When you see the numbers, see the staff. See the service. See the welcoming faces and the laughter, see the progressive faith that is inclusive and generous and open to learning, here in this place. When you look at the budget, see us at the PRIDE parade and the Women's March. See our values in our prayer life, our worship together. See your money in the work John does to keep this building clean and secure, the work Andréa does to put that bulletin in your hands, the music of Janet, the passionate leadership of Verne with our musicians, my leadership.

Our budget, the money we spend together...is here in this place, invested in one another. Invested in trust that God knows our need, and God has a plan for us as a community of faith, hope and love.

My sermon title is taken from the Micah reading: the false prophets and religious leaders could not see the future, Micah warned.

Micah did, and it was sorry and sad and bleak.

Our future is unknown, our vision cannot see into the future.

But we are not bleak, or sad.

We trust in God, we live together in a family of faith which is so much bigger than any of our families of origin.

And our faith filled values uphold us.

We believe that love is greater than betrayal, or suffering, or fear, or death.

We believe that out of death can come resurrection.

We believe that our lives given in love and community, in welcome and in service, in generous Christianity and in sustainable practices of living...this kind of life is the life God desires.

This is the life of we who strive to follow Jesus.

And so, though our financial numbers don't match up, we live in hope, with faith in a future that we cannot see.

Because we believe that all times, including the future, are in God's embrace and God is an unconditionally loving God. In whom we trust.

In whom we hope.

No, our giving does not cover how much we spend...this is true.

We are not blind to the difficulties ahead, but we will not be afraid either.

We will be "a welcoming faith community, who strengthen their relationships with God and each other".

We will "explore, question and nurture our spirits. We will respond to God's unconditional love, and with Jesus as our model, we will seek to live out love, compassion, and inclusion".

Now, and in the future that we cannot see.

Amen.