

February 2, 2014  
"The Bottom Line"

*This sermon was preached by Pastor Kurt Jacobson at Trinity Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI*

Micah 6: 1-8

**Hear what the Lord says:**

Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice.

Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel.

'O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.'

**(The people respond):**

'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?

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

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

**(The prophet Micah speaks):**

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?

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

The Biblical reading from the Old Testament prophet Micah was the basis of the evening devotions twice during our time in Jamaica last weekend. It's a passage that challenged us – just like it challenged the people to whom it was addressed centuries ago.

The challenge came in the final words of this

passage: *"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God."* It

was the call to do justice that challenged us. And before I say that word again – let me define it as it

appears before us in the Bible. Justice is enacting the good, merciful ways of God for the benefit of others

– especially for the poor and powerless. To do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with God is to

carry out the golden rule: Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.



Life for many of the people our team encountered in Jamaica last weekend is tough. Economically tough. The average full-time laborer earns \$50 a week. Inflation is at 12%. Gasoline is \$5 a gallon. The value of the Jamaica dollar has been on a steady decrease for many years. The standard of living for the average person in that country is visually evident to be far lower than what

we enjoy. So for our team to compare our lives here in Wisconsin to life on that Caribbean island was a challenge in itself. And then to come face to face with this call from God to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God – was even more challenge.

A little context about this Old Testament passage. It starts with a courtroom-like scene. God is presenting a case, a controversy with his people called Israel. They are the chosen people of God – ever since God laid out a covenant, a promise: “I will be your God and you will be my people.” But the people have not honored it. Despite God blessing them over and over, the people had become self-centered, smug. Their living didn’t reflect the goodness of the relationship God has established with them.

As God’s controversy is presented, God recounts the highlights of how the people of Israel had been beneficiaries of God’s goodness, guidance, and protection for centuries. God had gotten them out of trouble, slavery and provided for them in many ways. They were a richly blessed people.

As God wraps up presenting the controversy, next the people speak. In one of the greatest smirks and slams in the Bible, they ask: "So, what do you want God? What’s it going to cost us to get things right between us? Do want greater sacrifices – maybe even our firstborn children? What’s the bottom line we have to make to keep you happy in this relationship, God?"

To such snide, outlandish words, God's response is restrained simple. With infinite patience, God's message is that just three things are required in this covenant relationship. Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. (Micah 6:8).

A common phrase in financial transactions is "the bottom line." It makes no difference if you are buying a car, or a house, or planning a trip. Whatever it is, we want to know how much will it cost. What's the bottom line?



Sitting together last weekend in the context of a culture very different from ours, the guys on this team in Jamaica wrestled with Micah's words:

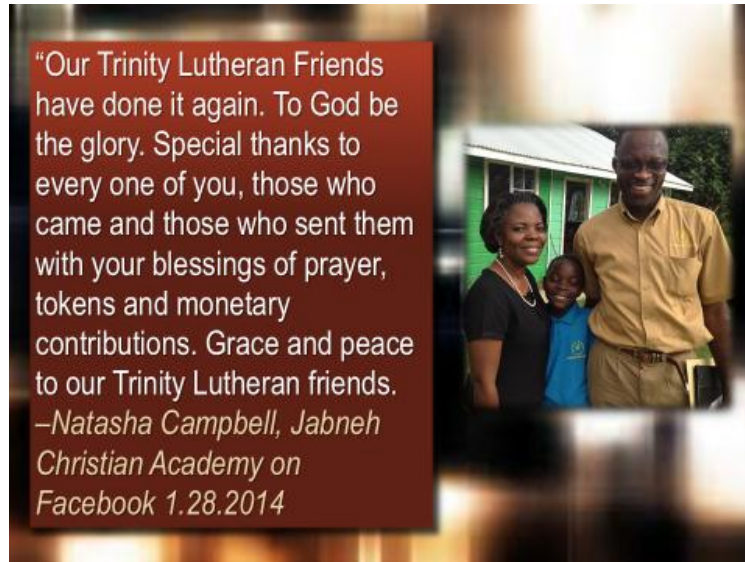
“God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.” The challenge was increased because we were sitting right in the middle of a culture where life is not nearly as comfortable and comprehensively good as we enjoy here.

This call to do justice makes a lot of Christians uncomfortable in our time. Plenty of people believe that faith and one’s relationship with God is separate from economic, political or business concerns.

Do justice. Love kindness. A humble walk with God. I wonder, what’s the bottom line for each of us in considering the relationship God has with us? What might we claim as the bottom line in living faith each day in every aspect of your life?

Do you recall the popular acronym that many Christians were wearing in the 90's? WWJD - what would Jesus do? As I think about justice, kindness and mercy - I see an answer to WWJD. But the questions this Old Testament passage puts before us -- and the words that were posed for my fellow travelers and servants in Jamaica last weekend make me think of a new acronym: WWJHMD. What would Jesus have ME DO.

Thanks to Micah, we have an answer don't we: "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." Amen.



Since 1998 Trinity has annually sent teams to Jamaica to enact our congregation's mission of "Serving in Christ's Love and Sharing the Good News." Designed to extend the love of Christ, this global mission of Trinity seeks to advance the outreach of the Church by:

- Loving our Jamaican neighbors by serving them through building, teaching and feeding projects
- Creating global and cross-cultural friendships
- Providing us new ways to share our time, money and abilities Trinity is dedicated to global mission partnerships that make a tangible for others God's love in Christ and assist in creating better communities through the work of the Church.

Since 2009 teams of Trinity men have partnered with Jabneh Christian Academy and provided two classroom structures, bathroom facilities and playground equipment. Trinity also provided a \$10,000 gift to assist with the purchase of the property.

The Academy enrolls 80 children from kindergarten to grade 8 and is a ministry of Maranatha Ministries International located in Kingston, Jamaica. Trinity has partnered with Maranatha Ministries International since 2000.

In January 2014 our partnership with Jabneh grew when six Trinity men represented us at Jabneh Christian Academy. Together with key leaders of the school they worked to complete the final portion of a classroom building and advanced the construction of a new restroom and shower facility.