

The Land as Witness: Micah 6:1-8
A Paulin Devotional

There's a tiny little book in the Old Testament, one of the "minor" prophets, Micah. 7 short chapters. But in it we find three of the most commonly cited passages in all of the Old Testament. Today we'll look at Micah 6, because it will tie in so well with the Scripture and message for tomorrow's service.

In Micah 6:1-8 we read:

¹Listen to what the LORD says:

"Stand up, plead my case before the mountains;
let the hills hear what you have to say.

²"Hear, you mountains, the LORD's accusation;
listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth.
For the LORD has a case against his people;
he is lodging a charge against Israel.

³"My people, what have I done to you?
How have I burdened you? Answer me.

⁴I brought you up out of Egypt
and redeemed you from the land of slavery.
I sent Moses to lead you,
also Aaron and Miriam.

⁵My people, remember
what Balak king of Moab plotted
and what Balaam son of Beor answered.
Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD."

⁶With what shall I come before the LORD
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

⁸ He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

There are different voices in this passage - Micah's, God's, and the voices of the people of Israel, as presented by Micah. It's important to hear them distinctly. This is set up as a court proceeding, with statements by the accuser, the bailiff, and the accused. The witness is the land itself.

Let's talk about that for a moment. God calls Micah to plead his case before the mountains, to let the hills hear. The everlasting foundations of the earth are to bear witness to what the Lord has to say.

That struck me in a new way this week, when I read it. On the last Sunday of the month at Paulin, we read a land acknowledgment during our service. And Land Acknowledgments can be contentious. Not everyone likes them, for a variety of reasons. Some people ask what the point is - we aren't giving the land back. Others feel it's a small and paltry gesture, and becomes meaningless when said in rote each month. Still others are uncomfortable - it wasn't our generation that took the land. Why are we still holding ourselves accountable?

But suddenly, I find myself reading a passage where God is asking the land to bear witness to His history with His people, and I think about what that means. The land knows. The sea opened up to allow the Israelites to cross to safety. The mountain saw them pass - God greeted Moses and gave him the Law on his holy mountain, Sinai. The land has borne witness in Micah 6, and it has borne witness in Canada.

God goes on to remind the people of his goodness, of his covenantal relationship with them, his deliverance of them from slavery. He reminds them of Balak, king of Moab, and of Balaam, his prophet and servant.

Balak had demanded of Balaam that he pronounce curses over the people of Israel as they passed below them in the valley. Balaam collected an exorbitant fee, stood to speak....and found himself able to utter only blessings. God would not allow the curses to be uttered. The people in the valley passed below, never knowing the danger they were in, never asking for God's protection in that moment. Obviously in the safety of the living God watching over them. And the land bore witness.

God reminds them of their journey from Shittim to Gilgal. Shittim was the last place they rested in their journey through the desert, when they turned to the god Peor, indulged in sexual immorality with Moabite women, and willingly bonded themselves to a foreign God. God recalled them to him, and when they crossed the Jordan into Gilgal and the Promised Land, they crossed at the season of flooding of the Jordan - but once again, the waters parted for them, and they crossed a dry river bed. They crossed literally from their lowest point to their great

deliverance, through the grace of God. And the land bore witness.

God asks the land to bear witness, and asks his people to remember.

Our land has borne witness to its history, too. And God asks his people to remember.

In Micah, the passage goes on, with the prophet now speaking sarcastically in the voice of the people of Israel - asking how can we come before the Lord? What offerings shall we bring him? A one-year-old calf? Thousands of rams, ten thousand impossible rivers of oil?

Yes. God set up a system of sacrifice. But the sacrifices weren't what God was seeking, in the end. The Israelites' questions reach the most outrageous, horrifying question at the peak of the passage: "Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

No. God didn't want that sacrifice FROM us. Instead, HE made that sacrifice FOR us, with Jesus.

Instead, Micah reminds the people emphatically, God has shown us what he requires of us. That we act justly. That we love mercy. And that we walk humbly with our God.

There is justice in acknowledging that the actions of our ancestors were sinful. We tend, in these modern times, to focus on individual sin, but over and over again we see God treating sin as a corporate, societal problem, and we shouldn't forget that. It is right and just to say, our ancestors sinned. They sinned against the Indigenous peoples. Realistically, we can't undo that harm.

But the land bears witness. And so must we. It is right and fair to acknowledge the lasting harm. It is right and fair to acknowledge that we are still benefitting from that harm. It is right and fair to use that acknowledgment to fuel our awareness to shape the future of this country together - to move intentionally in directions of reconciliation, to recognise that OUR generations have a responsibility to compensate for the harm done to our Indigenous peoples. To remain humble in our accounting of our societal sin.

This Sunday, we will be talking about how to love God properly, and how intrinsically we must love our neighbours as ourselves. I can think of no *better* time to share an intentional, thoughtful land acknowledgment and to testify to the fact that through the generations, the land does what God has always asked it to do: it bears witness.

