

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Micah 5:2-5

You may be wondering, “Why Micah?” One of the minor prophets, we don’t often refer to Micah during the liturgical year. A contemporary of other minor prophets, like Amos and Hosea, he was also a contemporary of the better-known prophet, Isaiah. He spoke to the people of both Israel and Judea before their time of captivity. His address was directed to the two capital cities of these nations, Samaria in Israel and Jerusalem in Judea.

His message denounced rulers, priests and false prophets, deplored the money-grubbing exploitation of the helpless, dishonesty in business, and sham religion. You may recall at this time in the history of Israel and Judea the people had fallen into idol worship and in some cases even child sacrifice. The “worship” of YWHW was rote and conducted more as an insurance policy in case the other gods fell short.

As a result of their backsliding the northern kingdom of Israel would eventually fall to the Assyrians, never to be heard from again. Judea was subjected to Assyrian assault, as well, yet escaped the fate of Israel. The nation would eventually fall to the Babylonian army about 100 years later and be taken into captivity for 70 years. Micah may well have experienced this violence to his people personally.

Micah speaks of deserved punishment to the nations for their disobedience to God. He also speaks of future restoration as God will bring home a remnant of his people, but only after they have done penance for their sins. His message is akin to that of Isaiah, a consistent message to God's people that although they will experience a time of suffering, there is hope for a better future.

People may have scoffed at Micah's message about the new ruler who would arise. Although coming from the line of King David, this new ruler would arrive on the scene, not in the capital city of Jerusalem, but in the little town of Bethlehem. You may recall that Bethlehem is the city of David's youth, where he served as a lowly shepherd, not as a king.

Micah sees a champion for the poor coming from within their own numbers. YHWH will act on behalf of those who are unjustly subjugated, exploited, and demoralized, even if the perpetrators are the royal successors of David. Along with the more contemporary Martin Luther King Jr., Micah believed that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." That will be accomplished by the future ruler who differs greatly from his predecessors. He will not be a warrior king like David, this ruler will be "one of peace."

Unlike David, this ruler will rule through diplomacy. There will be no need for spears and swords any longer, as there will no longer be a need for war. Eugene Peterson explains it this way in *The Message*:

“And the people will have a good and safe home, for the whole world will hold him in respect – Peacemaker of the world!”

The people of Micah’s day saw so much greed and deception in high places. Would they, or could they, believe that “the one of peace”, whose weapons of choice were kindness and gentleness, would win their security and safety, when they saw so much violence around them? Could they believe that someone from little, out-of-the-way Bethlehem would be “great to the ends of the earth?” The question for us this morning is, “Can we believe?”

Here we are just days away from celebrating this peaceful king’s arrival in the world. Can we, do we, believe He is our hope for security and safety? Truth be told we may struggle a bit as we look at the world around us today - wars and rumors of wars, despots who are out only for themselves, rampant poverty around the world, pollution in our skies and seas. These are the Assyria and Babylon of today.

2000-plus years after Christ, “there is nothing new under the sun,” to quote the Teacher from Ecclesiastes. What happened to the safety and security the Prince of Peace was to bring to mankind? Unfortunately, mankind is still mankind and struggles to keep its focus on the only One

that can promise that safety and security. Does that mean we should abandon hope? Absolutely, not

The words spoken by the prophet have been fulfilled. The name of Jesus is known around the world by almost all the world's people. There remain a few pockets of mankind that the Good News has not yet reached. We still look forward to the hope of the returning Christ once all people groups have heard the Word of God, the deliverance of all peoples in all places.

In the meantime, where do we find the safety and security we are promised? We would do well to follow these musings from the Albanian Indian nun, Mother Teresa:

- "Because we cannot see Christ, we cannot express our love to him, but our neighbors we can always see, and we can do to them what if we saw him, we would like to do to Christ."
- "There are no great things, only small things with great love."

“God has not called me to be successful. He called me to be faithful.”

This small woman brought safety and security to the lowest of the low in Calcutta. Her only weapon was love. Here in this country a young black man living in the segregated South led a movement of non-violent resistance to the established social norms. Martin Luther King, Jr., fought for his people without once resorting to the type of violence he

and his people had been subjected to for generations. Neither of these people came from “royal stock”, they were born the equivalent of a “peasant” in the days of Jesus. Neither came from the power centers of their respective countries. Their hometowns were the Bethlehem’s of the 20th century.

With this knowledge, let us look to the Bethlehem’s of today. What movements of peace might come from the small towns and villages of our nation today? What good might come out of Hatfield? Lansdale? Souderton? Or Montgomeryville? How might the church in these little places be called to witness to the King of Kings born in a manger some 2000 years ago?

We are not to lose hope. He is coming as a babe on Christmas Day and He is coming again as the Risen Lord and Savior of all mankind. Until that day may we all work toward His peace. A peace that passes all human understanding. Let us look to those who are on the fringes of our society and work together *“that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together;”* as Dr. King exclaimed.

I close with these words from Dr. King:

Use me, God. Show me how to take who I am, who I want to be,
and what I can do, and use it for a purpose greater than myself.

May this be our prayer until Christ returns. AMEN

Lynne Allebach

December 22, 2024 Hatfield Church of Brethren