

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (A)

Micah 6.1-8

Psalm 15

1 Corinthians 1.18-31

Matthew 5.1-12

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**Micah 6.1-8**

- 1) Micah was a prophet of the 8<sup>th</sup> C., B.C. He was from an area near Hebron, in what is now the West Bank.
  - a) Micah is concerned with the people's rejection of God, with sin being the reason for punishment to come.
    - i) The king of Assyria is an unconscious instrument of God's wrath.
- 2) The language used in the present lesson is from the section of Micah in which the LORD sets forth His accusations against Israel in the form of a formal charge (as in a court of law).
  - a) Vv. 1-2 include the form of address (setting the stage for the charges to follow), and are followed by vv. 3-5 as a lamentation which recites the LORD's mighty deeds.
    - i) This lamentation is used in Holy Week (*e.g.*, on Good Friday).
    - ii) It is a profession of faith, as found at Josh. 24.2-13.
  - b) Vv. 6-7 describe true faith as expressed in sacrificial offerings.
    - i) Presupposed is that the confession of sin precedes offerings.
  - c) V. 8 concludes with instruction in what God requires: to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.
- 3) Translated variously into English, in vv. 1-2 three times the term *rîb* (lawsuit) appears.
  - a) God is both accuser and judge. The defendant is His people, who have been unfaithful.
  - b) The radical character of the offerings described in vv. 6-7 is linked to the gravity of the sin.

**Psalm 15**

- 1) Psalm 15 is an entrance liturgy, for use at the Temple.
  - a) Would-be worshippers would stand at the Temple gate, seeking admittance.
    - i) Thus the question, who is worthy to enter?
      - (1) Note that the question is not asked by a temple guard or priest, but by the one who seeks admission, himself.
        - (a) The psalm thus recites what the believer is called to.
- 2) The just person is the one who does what is right, and who speaks the truth.
- 3) Walking unhindered is a common image in the Old Testament for happiness.
  - a) Stumbling or falling is an image of ruin: Prov. 3.23; 4.12; Isa. 40.31; 63.13; Jer. 31.9.

**1 Corinthians 1.18-31**

- 1) Corinth was famed in the ancient world for the luxuries enjoyed there, the wealth of her citizens, and the pervasive attitude that "What happens in Corinth stays in Corinth."

- a) The city had a reputation of being worldly in the extreme, and of being populated by sophisticates.
  - b) The city also had a reputation as “Sin City,” with more than 1000 prostitutes at the temple of Aphrodite.
    - i) “Corinthian” was used in words such as *korinthiazesthai* (to fornicate).
- 2) Having opened his letter with greetings, and noting that divisions are present in the Christian community, Paul proceeds to describe how God has different standards.
- a) Believers must detach themselves from the standards of fallen humanity. The cross turns sophisticated logic upside down.
  - b) The fact of acceptance or rejection of the cross separates those who are being saved from those who are fallen.
  - c) The worldly wisdom that rejects the Gospel has been condemned by God. (Paul quotes Isa. 29.14 in the *Septuagint* [Greek] canon.)
- 3) God’s ways are not the ways of human beings (*cf.* Rom. 11.33); hence the paradox described in v. 25.
- a) The paradox of God’s call is demonstrated in the Corinthian community (v. 26: “not many were wise, etc.”)
  - b) Jesus demonstrates God’s call, and those who accept His call are separated from sinners (they are sanctified), removed from the control of sin (redeemed), and so become what they should be before God (righteous). (*See* v. 31.)

### **Matthew 5.1-12**

- 1) The Beatitudes are found in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. (Cf. Luke 6, which contains the parallel “Sermon on the Plain”.)
- a) Matthew lists eight beatitudes (7 + 1), Luke four (3 + 1). The three that are common are likely quotations from Jesus.
    - i) Jesus is referring to Is. 61.1-4.
    - ii) The additional one in Luke reflects, probably, early Church teaching.
    - iii) The additional four beatitudes in Matthew reflect his exordium on the blessings listed in the Psalms.
- 2) A beatitude is a form of congratulation that recognizes an existing form of happiness.
- a) The form is not that one will *be* blessed, but that one *is*.
    - i) For example, the poor are not happy not because they are morally better (and thus will enjoy a future blessing, if they are in fact morally better), but because of God’s special care for them.
  - b) The “poor in spirit” are those who are humble.
  - c) The “meek” are those who are slow to anger.
  - d) Those who “mourn” mourn the evil they see on the earth.
  - e) The “merciful” are those who pardon their neighbors, as referred to in the Lord’s Prayer.
  - f) The other categories listed by Matthew can be interpreted on the basis of the common meanings of the terms used.