

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish in Newark  
Newark, DE  
The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany – January 29, 2017/Year A  
Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12  
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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*May my words reveal the greater glory of God. AMEN*

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*“[God] 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?”*

These oft quoted, or misquoted, words of prophetic power have been glowing coals of missional transformations and justice seeking protests chronicled over our history. Scholars see this as Micah **calling the question** on the Northern Kingdom of Israel as they face the ongoing siege of the powerful Assyrian Empire in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

Likened to a prosecuting attorney, God challenges the people of Israel through this series of rhetorical questions. Each question is laced with certain amounts of pain through the truth of their unfaithfulness to God's will and ways. No matter the answer, it will not be the answer God has then or now desires. We might see this as an ancient example of current day “spinning” of the story with **alternative facts**.

Then we come to this final verse, ending with a **question mark**. It seems to me that anyone with the smallest seed of faith can hear this as God's invitation to missional life and living. This is simply a no-brainer call of being human in our community of humanity and, as we proclaim in our Baptismal Covenant, **“to respect the dignity of EVERY human being.”** One would think an **exclamation point** was misplaced somewhere in the translations over the centuries.

Then again, perhaps the **question mark** is the invitation of the Holy One I bear into my decision to live this faith I proclaim. I need to question the **question mark** a little more closely and honestly in my life. How is it, really, that I *do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God?* I know too well from this life journey the answer to the **question mark**. It would be a tad emptier and filled with some fluffy “story spinning” of how I am REALLY living this faith question.

Michelle was a seminary classmate back in the days. Raised in a Southern state, she brought an earthy, practical, and often witty wisdom when we would wrestle with conundrums theological. Formed in the Southern Episcopal Church ways, she brought a mix of quiet and orderly liturgy with hellfire and brimstone preaching! When discussing this question of Micah in our Old Testament study group, she said in her honey-buttered drawl, **“Oh lawdy, all old Micah was saying is what Jesus said to the disciples in the Great Commission. He could've put a question mark there too. WE are called by God to live Micah's question and Jesus' charge in the Great Commission. When we don't, they just are some pretty words that make up**

**our Great OMISSION. It is our call and choice to change the question into our living exclamation point!”**

“... *to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*” How can this be and become an EXCLAMATION POINT of living faith for you?

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Mark Twain once defined a **classic** as “**a good book that many people praise but few of them read.**” His earthy humor pricks the edges of our conscience. I suspect this could be true of our daily relationship with the Bible. While disturbing, we see this played out again and again in the stories we hear at least once a week, like Micah on this day.

Micah was prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The embattled nation, standing on the precipice of defeat and dissolution at the hands of the hated Assyrians, reads like a post-game report of the Eagles this year – **here is what you did not do ... here is what you did again and not so well again ... here are your Great Omissions!**

Micah unfolds a courtroom-like setting in this conversation of God with the people of God. God calls on all of Creation, represented by the mountains, to look down in witness, “*O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!*” Micah goes on in God’s Word to remind them of their redeeming from slavery of Egypt, calling Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to lead them to this Promised Land, and the countless other times since of deliverance from their enemies -- *In what have I wearied you? Answer me!*

They knew no answer would suffice but the truth, and the truth was their unfaithful ways. They well knew what God had told them, invited them, at times pleaded with them to live in covenant again, and again, and again, and ... The Holy One required nothing more of the people then, and God’s people now, than to **pay forward** the justice they had received, the loving-kindness abundantly shown to them, now wasted and hoarded as their own, and the humility of living IN God’s love and loving ways. When we fail to live fully into our call as redeemed people of God’s love in Christ Jesus, we are navigating life in a Great Omission which will ever remain a **question mark** until ...

There is a process called **Appreciative Inquiry** which guides individuals and groups through a visioning and mission-making process by looking at **what has been, what is now, and what can we be.** Your Vestry servant leaders have experienced this approach in their annual retreat the past two years which has helped form and frame the Mission and Vision statement on the front of our bulletin. Through this process, there is one constant formative statement used as a touchstone in the work being done – **What you focus on can become your reality.** If we focus on **cannot, should not, or will not happen, it can become our reality.** If we focus on the **transformation of our missional life together, it can become our reality.**

**“... to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” How can this be and become an EXCLAMATION POINT of living faith for you? How can this become our focus now and always?**

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In one of his daily meditations, Fr. Richard Rohr offered the following that speaks to me of a **transformed Great Commission way of faith living**. Here is what Fr. Rohr wrote:

**“Christians speak of the “paschal mystery,” the process of loss and renewal that was lived and personified in the death and raising up of Jesus, as *the pattern of transformation*. We can affirm that belief in lovely song and ritual, as many Christians do in the Eucharist. However, until we have personally lost our own foundation and then experienced God upholding us so that we come out even more alive on the other side, the theological affirmation of the paschal mystery is little understood and not essentially transformative. It is a mere liturgical acclamation.**

**“Cross and resurrection,” or loss and renewal if you prefer, is a doctrine to which most Christians might intellectually assent; but we worshiped it in Jesus, thanked him for it, and rarely transferred it to our own lives. This mystery of transformation must become the very cornerstone of our own life philosophy. We move into this mystery through actual encounter, surrender, trust, and the infilling of a new and larger life that proceeds from it. *This is the experience of an inner movement and presence, not a mere belief or moral position.*” Daily Meditation. Mysticism. 1/25/17**

**Living the question mark or exclamation point? Living to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God and the Great Commission?**

**Choose this day, and live!**

***AMEN***