

Sermon for November 16th, 2025
TWENTY SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Micah 6:1-8

- 1** Hear what the LORD says:
Arise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.
- 2** Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD,
and you enduring foundations of the earth,
for the LORD has an indictment against his people,
and he will contend with Israel.
- 3** “O my people, what have I done to you?
How have I wearied you? Answer me!
- 4** 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.
- 5** O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised,
and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.”
- 6** “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?
- 7** Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
- 8** He has told you, O man, 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?

Psalm 116:12-19

- 12** What shall I render to the LORD
for all his benefits to me?
- 13** I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,
- 14** I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.
- 15** Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.

16 O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.
You have loosed my bonds.
17 I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the LORD.
18 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,
19 in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD!

Philippians 1:3-11

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, **4** always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, **5** because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. **6** And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. **7** It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. **8** For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. **9** And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, **10** so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, **11** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Matthew 18:21-35

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” **22** Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.
23 “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. **24** When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. **25** And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. **26** So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ **27** And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. **28** But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ **29** So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ **30** He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. **31** When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. **32** Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. **33** And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ **34** And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. **35** So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Our text for meditation this Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

The past is a foreign country to us, and the further back you go in history the more alien it becomes to us. There are now two generations of people born who have not lived without the internet, gen Z and gen Alpha, and they literally cannot imagine what life was like. Even if you took a twenty year old man and put him in a town with no internet connectivity for a month, he would filter the experience through *comparison* with his life online. In the same way, most of us cannot imagine a life without cars or roads. If we were required to go to some quaint village with no automobiles for a month, most of us would feel trapped there simply because there is no mechanized ability to escape. Maybe we could *imagine* what it was like two hundred years ago, to be without cars or the internet, but we cannot live that experience without it being and feeling alien to us. This, with other things like running water and modern medicine, separates us from the ancients in too many ways to count. We simply take too many things for granted.

Christians living today also suffer from this feeling when it comes to the Old Covenant. We understand *what* the Mosaic Law said and we can read the requirements placed on the faithful to stay in relationship with our Lord, but we cannot understand what it was *like*. And no, looking at the way Jews live today does not count; there is no Temple nor tabernacle nor Ark of the Covenant standing for the Jews to live in an accurate “Old Testament” way. We do not even know what their Temple furnishings *looked* like, since these were all gone by the time the Romans sacked Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Meanwhile, we have lived with the privilege of being part of the New Covenant. We understand that God has sent His only Son to die for our sins and rise again so that we may have the full assurance of salvation. We live in great freedom as well; we do not have to get our sons circumcised, we can eat pretty much whatever we want, we have few clothing regulations and we do not have to make sacrifices. I have gotten a good number of tattoos, something verboten under the Old Covenant, and I stand in confidence that I have not sinned in the slightest by getting them.

This New Covenant reality often leads to us being too quick to judge the men and women of Israel during the Old Covenant times. While the Church praises men like Abraham or David, we point our fingers at the Israelites who fell into Baal worship or gross sins, as though we are better than them. Yes, their apostasy was evil, but condemning it is meaningless if we have not even tried to understand *what it was like*. Today's Old Testament reading gives us a window into their point of view. We may not understand it fully, but Micah gives us a hint.

The Exasperated Israelite

God tells the Northern Kingdom of Israel that He has an indictment. Many prophets had come to Israel to condemn their sins and command them to repent, but now it is time to go to court, and our Lord Himself will be the prosecutor. Micah the prophet has to serve as the unhappy middleman between the two, going around and making this proclamation from God to the people and seeing how they respond. God's case is this: “What have I done to you? How have I wearied you?” In light of the good things God has done, for the children of Israel to engage in half-hearted worship and flirt with idolatry and consider His ways a *burden* is downright insulting. After all, our Lord reasons, He has brought them out of Egyptian slavery, given them prophets, and blessed them; even when a pagan king Balak paid the prophet Balaam to curse them, God promised more blessings! What more could they want? How could they respond to all of this goodness from God with “weariness?”

Shockingly, we actually have the Israelites' response in this passage. Micah relates that they point to the offering system and amplify it. They have come to the conclusion that God is *unpleasable*, and they downright *explode* their discontent towards our Lord. It is as if they were to say,

“Oh, You're mad again, Lord? Like You always are? You send us prophet after prophet telling us how bad we are all the time. Never any praise,

never any promises. Oh yes, You blessed us alright, blessed us with dour oracles and this heavy Law yoked around our necks like an anchor pulling down a sinking boat! You told us with the Law to make sacrifices to expiate our sin, and we do that, and yet here You are still mad! So what is it You want? Are the sacrifices not enough? Here then, have another sterling year-old calf that my family won't get to eat because You are upset again. Oh, what's that? You're *angry again*? Fine, have a *thousand* rams, a *thousand* rivers of oil! Still not enough? It's NEVER enough! What, should we sacrifice our children to You? Is that it, you want us to suffer? WHAT DO YOU WANT?"

This was their argument, and honestly I imagine there was something of a pause before Micah relayed God's response to them. The prophet must have been taken aback! The people were doing what they could under the Mosaic code that had been given to them, and it never seemed like they were doing enough, they never got the “attaboy” that we all crave to hear from God. Sure, the prophet could argue that the Israelites in the northern territory had been following a corrupted system. He could bring up that Jeroboam instituted the wrong priest system and that God did not approve of their two temples and so many other flaws,¹ but what would *that* accomplish? These people were not *born* in Judah where the true Temple was, and it was not like they could immigrate there, since the children of Judah were likely to keep them out – just before Micah wrote his book, Israel and Judah had just been at war!² So even if they wanted to, they could not fix these problems. The prophet, unhappy as he was, had to wait for a response from on high.

God's Answer

The answer God gives must have been even more puzzling to him. “He has told you, O man, 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?” This is to say, He wants their hearts. The sacrifices and ceremonies wouldn't do anything, even if these people did them correctly. God wants them to start doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do, and He wants them to love kindness – His kindness, surely, but also for them to be kinder to their neighbors. This is all well and good, Micah must have thought, but the prophets had been saying that to them for centuries and it *did not answer their question*.

The Israelites ask God how exactly they are supposed to gain forgiveness for all of these sins, and God never answers the question. Remember my friends, they are under the *Old Covenant*, where the full Gospel had not been revealed. You and I can listen to any sermon and hear the Gospel, that our sins have been forgiven by the shed blood of our Savior on a Roman cross. *We* get to hear that sacrifices are not necessary, because we know that Jesus Himself was the final sacrifice for sin; back then, neither the prophets nor even the angels knew what the plan was.³ God kept the plan of salvation hidden so that nothing could be done to prevent it.⁴ So what is the message God gives the Northern Israelites? “Walk humbly with your God.” This is to say, He tells them “*Trust Me*.” He'll take care of their sins, He will do something, but in the meantime they must rely on Him without knowing the details and work on their character.

After this, the prophet details even more defects in Israel's national character, explaining why they are to go into Exile. Micah's response to this entire episode is to become completely miserable, until God gives him an oracle telling the children of Israel (and him) that they should wait on God's

1 1 Kings 12:25-33

2 The Syro-Ephraimite War, waged in 735 B.C., 2 Kings 16.

3 1 Peter 1:10-12

4 1 Corinthians 2:6-8

later mercies.⁵ But the difficulties and frustrations persisted for another seven hundred and fifty years, until Christ went to the Cross and rose again to justify all who believe in Him.

Conclusion

My friends, it is safe to say that living under the Old Covenant was difficult. Being so far in the past, the men and women living under it had an entirely different experience than we have, such that we cannot even begin to imagine it. Surely, the past is a foreign country. But with passages like this, we understand at least that their experience was a painful, frustrating one with only the slightest hope to live with day to day. St. Peter, commenting on the Old Covenant, says that the yoke was something “that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear.”⁶ But this is why they rejoiced so much at everything Jesus did for us! This is why St. Paul celebrated freedom from the Law, why the author of Hebrews triumphantly brings up the New Covenant over and over again in his book.⁷ No longer do men have to wallow in the fog of uncertainty when it comes to their sins. No more do they have to groan with the men of Israel that they cannot shed so much blood anymore. No longer do they have to fear that some infraction will lead to their merciless death.⁸ *Now* men have Christ, and the good news that they have forgiveness, freedom, and salvation in His Name. *Now* men know that the terrible yoke of the Law has been taken off of their necks and shattered, and even the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments, does not accuse the soul of one living in penitent faith.

We may not know exactly what the old Israelites were thinking, what life was like for them, or how it felt to live under the old system. But we can look at passages like this, and see the joy of the Apostles and the rest of the early Church, and have the same joy. Let us meditate on how our Lord has freed us from our *own* former religions, which were even more oppressive and dour than what the Israelites had (even if we did not notice it). Let us take hold of the joy set before all the saints in the salvation and freedom won for us by our Lord Jesus.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁵ Micah 6:9-7:20

⁶ Acts 15:10

⁷ All seventeen uses of the word “Covenant” in Hebrews are in comparison between the Old and the New, celebrating that the New had superseded the Old.

⁸ Hebrews 10:28