

Sermon for July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Micah 7:18-20

- 18** Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity  
and passing over transgression  
for the remnant of his inheritance?  
He does not retain his anger forever,  
because he delights in steadfast love.
- 19** He will again have compassion on us;  
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.  
You will cast all our sins  
into the depths of the sea.
- 20** You will show faithfulness to Jacob  
and steadfast love to Abraham,  
as you have sworn to our fathers  
from the days of old.

Psalm 103:1-13

- 1** Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name!
- 2** Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits,
- 3** who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,
- 4** who redeems your life from the pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
- 5** who satisfies you with good  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- 6** The LORD works righteousness  
and justice for all who are oppressed.
- 7** He made known his ways to Moses,  
his acts to the people of Israel.
- 8** The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- 9** He will not always chide,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.
- 10** He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
- 11** For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
- 12** as far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

**13** As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

1 Timothy 1:12-17

**12** I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, **13** though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, **14** and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. **15** The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. **16** But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. **17** To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Luke 15:1-10

**1** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. **2** And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”  
**3** So he told them this parable: **4** “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? **5** And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. **6** And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ **7** Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.  
**8** “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? **9** And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ **10** Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Our text for meditation this Third 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**

Today's reading sounds very pleasant until you recognize when (and to whom) it was written. The prophet Micah wrote to the children of Israel and Judah around the same time as Isaiah. Much of his writing is full of wrath and condemnation for the wicked social practices that he saw: oppression of the poor,<sup>1</sup> crass idolatry, and refusal to hear the Word of the Lord. There were false prophets in his day too, who gave false oracles for money,<sup>2</sup> and the political rulers cared little what God had to say to them. Thus Micah pronounces a terrible judgment against both countries, culminating in only a small remnant of the descendants of Jacob being permitted to live as a coherent people group.<sup>3</sup>

Since the Word of the Lord accomplishes what God says, this judgment came for both Israel and Judah with a harsh fulfillment. Israel was wiped out, taken into captivity by the Assyrians, and only a tiny remnant remained in Samaria. A hundred and fifty years after that, Judah itself was taken into the Babylonian Exile, and only a small group returned after seventy years. When all this happened and the Exiles remembered the prophet's words in our reading, promising forgiveness and compassion from the Lord, there must have been a temptation to believe that these words were hollow.

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<sup>1</sup> Esp. chapter 2

<sup>2</sup> Micah 3:5-8

<sup>3</sup> Micah 5:7-8

For a moment, let us put ourselves in the shoes of one of these Exiles. After all, the Assyrian captivity was accomplished in Micah's lifetime. It is easy to believe in Divine pardon when things are going good, to grasp the forgiveness God offers when your belly is full and you sleep well at night. But imagine being a man among the tribe of Issachar, being led away with a fish hook in your mouth, to brutal slavery in some remote corner of the Assyrian Empire. Chained to a wall and forced to sift grain for hours and hours, only being let go to drag heavy carts from one farm to the next. The woman you once called your wife is now part of a harem of slave women to an officer in the Assyrian army. Being beaten regularly, perhaps tortured to inflict cruel deformities on your flesh, all the while knowing that you were told by this prophet Micah that you *deserve it*. Perhaps you dream every night of the prophet you once laughed at, now dancing and mocking you as he sings "I told you so! I told you so!" And so the torment goes on until you are too weak to work, and so they put you down like an old dog.

The reality of God's Judgment being fulfilled did not wake the Northern Israelites out of their idolatrous stupor. In fact, idolatry persisted in Samaria, both among the remnant that remained and the foreigners brought in by the Assyrians.<sup>4</sup> Even though the prophets had foretold that this would happen, predicting it for *centuries*, the Captivity did not bring many of them to repentance. The most we could say about any improvement in their character is that they were more afraid of God than they were previously – but they did not *fear* God in the sense of true faith and reverence.

## Holding On

So then, we come to our reading today and feel even more puzzled. An Israelite living under Exile lived with the constant reminder that the prophets were right (especially Micah), and that it was wrong to ignore and persecute them for their oracles. Why then, did they not also rejoice in the promise of pardon? Why did the majority of them turn to idols even more? Surely, if the promises of judgment were proven true, then the promises of forgiveness and restoration must also be true! And yet, sadly they did not see it that way. Why is this the case?

The reason is very simple. In our reading, Micah writes that God pardons iniquity and passes over transgression "for the remnant of His inheritance." This is not referring to a remnant of *survivors*, but of *believers*, for precious few receive the forgiveness offered. To receive forgiveness requires faith in the One who forgives. It is an active faith, not the kind of belief that says "God exists and He punished us," but the kind which says "against all appearances, God shall be merciful." It is the kind of faith which *holds on* for dear life to the promises of God, even if it looks like He has abandoned you. Luther says in the *Bondage of the Will*, that God "conceals His eternal mercy and loving-kindness behind His eternal wrath." Thus he also says, "This is the highest degree of faith—to believe that He is merciful, who saves so few and damns so many."<sup>56</sup>

Only a tiny, miniscule remnant of Northern Israel was given mercy, because only a tiny and miniscule remnant of them believed what God said about it. For the rest of them, they relied on their reason, their senses, and their pain to come to the conclusion that our Lord just hated them forever. These Exiles would say something like this: "Oh, Micah, you say that He does not retain His anger forever? But I am chained to this wall. My legs were broken by the Assyrians so that I do not run away. They killed my children, and I am rotting away in my pain. It seems to me, Micah, that He has made His eternal hatred very plain." And so, resisting the Gospel offer of pardon, they choose to stay in their punishment.

## The Difference

What about the modern day though? Are things really so different when it comes to the Church? Absolutely. The words Micah wrote ring so true in our hearts that we cannot do otherwise but rejoice.

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4 2 Kings 17

5 *Bondage of the Will*, section XXIV

6 <https://www.covenantor.org/reformed/2015/7/8/the-sovereignty-of-god-sections-9-27>

Today, there are countless believers who live in dire conditions. They live in their own personal versions of the Exile, whether their pain is merited or not. We have brothers and sisters in Christ who are afflicted with diseases and cancer, some being a consequence of their actions and others being simple tragedy. Men who were brought to the faith after years of being drug addicts, now living under the burden of HIV from a shared heroin needle, children born with severe fetal alcohol syndrome, and more. There are criminals on death row, awaiting execution, that are now Christians. And all of them, despite these horrible things that none of us would ever want to experience, rejoice in the Lord. They all *hold on* to the promises the Gospel gives us of forgiveness and eternal life. They sing hymns of praise even though their existence might involve – for now – constant unending pain.

This is the difference between the nonbeliever and the saint when it comes to suffering. Whether the pain is something we deserve or not, you and I can remember the Gospel and then sing with the Psalmist, “His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning.”<sup>7</sup> Like Job we can hold on for dear life to the mercies of God and proclaim that, whether this pain is our fault or not, He shall deliver us. It is not so with those who lack the capacity to exercise their faith. Believers may be sanctified by God's discipline,<sup>8</sup> but hardly ever will an apostate be brought back by His wrath, let alone a nonbeliever. The damned look at the punishments inflicted on them, and they conclude that it means God's love is impossible.

## Conclusion

Beloved, take a moment to think about your life today. What are your struggles? Are you having difficulty paying the bills, finding a spouse, or dealing with injuries and sickness? Does it get hard to wake up every morning and get out of bed, knowing that there is pain and frustration to confront? Do you wonder if what you are going through is a punishment from our Lord for your past sins? Then whatever the answer, now is the time to *hold on* to the promises of our Lord, for in so doing you shall receive a mighty restoration by His Right Hand. He has granted us faith in our Baptism, and now we are called to actively exercise that faith by trusting in His promises. For just as He promised mercy to the remnant of Israel who believed, so too does He promise mercy and blessing upon the remnant of humanity who will believe. Christ proved this love and forgiveness by dying on a Cross for our sins, and guaranteeing an eternal inheritance for those who trust in Him; let us then hold on no matter what the difficulties, and rejoice.

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

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<sup>7</sup> Psalm 30:5

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 12:3-17