

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

We Are Missions and Justice

Old Testament Lesson

Micah 4:1-5 (NRSVUE)

¹ In days to come the mountain of the LORD's temple shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, ² and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ³ He shall judge between many peoples and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more; ⁴ but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. ⁵ For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.

Bible/Sermon Focus

We are in our second week of a Sermon Series titled, "We Are Manchester." Our Mission Statement at Manchester UMC is that, "We are called to make a difference for Christ by transforming church and community."

And in this series, we will be looking at different areas of ministry that make up the identity of Manchester UMC, and what our particularities as Manchester UMC, are in those ministry areas, to live into our mission together. This week we are talking about Missions and Justice.

Our scripture for this week comes from the prophet Micah. Micah is one of the earliest prophets from the prophetic tradition in the Old Testament. He and the other 8th century (BCE) prophets lived during a time when the systems of government and oversight began to fail the common person. Land that was passed from father to son for generations was being acquired by the wealthiest of the nation through unfair business practices, and the court system that was supposed to protect them was being paid off by the same wealthy few. And into this injustice, God calls the prophets. Prophets are people that God has called to stand up to the oppressors of God's people in the world.

Prophets were called to go to the kings and the wealthy of the nation and remind them that they had broken the covenant between themselves and God. That the law God had given to the people in the wilderness, was given to protect the people, and so that they would not forget that at one time *they* were slaves in Egypt, that *they* had been the oppressed. The fear being if they forgot that they had been the oppressed, they would become the oppressor. And in our text from Micah we are presented with a vision of how God wants it to be. That the tools of war shall be recrafted to be tools that tend to God's creation, tool that produce food to feed us all. We are presented with a vision where everyone has their own, small plot of land, with tree to shade their bodies under, in a nation where they do not need to be afraid.

In the United Methodist Church we have a tradition of standing up for, and standing with the most oppressed among us. This roots from our understanding of social holiness. Reverend Richard Teal says that social holiness means, "to truly share in the good news means living in God's kingdom now, allowing God's rule and reign now."

This is why we have a tradition that stood against child labor, and stood for the formation of unions. This is why so many suffragist were Methodist Women. For us Methodists, there is simply no where that God's reign does not reach. And if there is a space where suffering is happening, then we are called to respond to that suffering, to do something about it. And there are two main ways that people can respond, one is through charity (missions) and the other is through advocacy (justice). The difference between these two responses is something that we as a congregation, and a denomination are still learning about.

For our churches to distinguish the difference between charity work and advocacy work, mission and justice, we need to have a solid biblical framework for defining these terms, and a means of application to educate our congregations. And this is one of the reasons that our missions ministry and our social justice ministry are separate, yet connected. They are both related to social holiness, and both are part of our tradition as Methodists. Yet, they are distinct in their application.

Mission and charity address the needs of a person or population to alleviate their current state of struggle or oppression in the immediate, by directly addressing social needs through services. Advocacy and justice work seeks to promote social change. Advocacy and justice work address social needs by seeking to change the conditions which are the root cause of those needs.

Manchester UMC has both of these ministries to meet the needs of our community, and to meet the comfort zone and calling of our members. Manchester UMC has both of these ministries to live into our mission that, "we are called to make a difference for Christ by transforming church and community." For more information about missions and justice ministries check out the "Grow" tab on our website www.manchesterumc.org We have over 20 different opportunities to get involved with Missions and Justice.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your current level of involvement in our missions and justice ministers? How does this work speak into your calling? How does this work speak into our mission as Manchester UMC?
2. Using this quote from Reverend Richard Teal, that social holiness means, "to truly share in the good news means living in God's kingdom now, allowing God's rule and reign now." How do the Missions and Justice ministries at Manchester UMC God's reign in our communities?
3. Who are the prophets that God has called today?
4. Did you learn anything new about our Mission & Justice ministries that you are excited about?

Prayer

God of the Justice, you have called your people to respond to the suffering of creation and your people. Guide us that our work may be rooted in our Christian identity, and not in partisan politics. Be with the least of these among us, and guide our work to make your reign here on earth. Be with the members of our congregation who are called to missions and justice. Amen.

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can". - John Wesley