

“Change the World: Religion with Feet”
Micah 6:6-8

Today we begin a sermon series called “Change the World” with the invitation and challenge to look at how God is calling us to use our gifts to heal the world. A good place to start is God’s dream for the world. The stories of creation in Genesis remind us that God’s vision for the world is that of peace, wholeness, and abundance. Yet, the emotional state of our world is often that of fear, conflict and scarcity. We don’t have to look too far to see this. The last couple of weeks, the news media has been obsessing over a possible economic recession like the one we had in 2008: <https://youtu.be/q9McyZgojeM>. Even the stock market is dependent on our emotional economic state.

So how do we make God’s dream a reality in our world in a context that seems impossible to change and transform? We look today to the Prophet Micah for guidance. His time and context were similar to our time in their challenges. Micah was a country prophet in the southern kingdom of ancient Israel after the fall of the northern kingdom into the hands of the Assyrians. This was a time of great uncertainty and fear in his culture. Micah provided his people with a warning about and an inspiration for what was to happen next. They could live like the rest of the cultures around them, enamored by the gods of money, success, and power, or they could live as agents of God pursuing justice and peace. Micah had a vision for the city of Jerusalem to become a place of worship and justice for all nations. Nations and peoples would find themselves drawn to Zion. They would come to learn God's ways, and they would find that their weapons of warfare would be of no further use. God's way of settling disputes would be through international mediation, through the learning of the paths along which justice could be pursued, and through walking along those paths. This vision of a world guided by God's teachings is more than a mere ideal. It is a testimony of Micah's faith that such a day is coming.

Micah saw that the way to fulfill this dream was for people to match their worship with their actions and lifestyles. The people of ancient Israel had been faithful in their worship, but their economic and social systems had become corrupt serving only the interests and greed of the wealthy and powerful. They had replaced following God’s commands for the social systems of their lives with an exclusive focus on temple worship and sacrifices. Instead of doing justice, practicing jubilee, and loving their neighbors, they focused on offering burnt sacrifices to God in the temple. They had reduced their relationship with God to rituals and empty worship.

Micah called the people of ancient Israel to renew their faith in God in their daily lives. The prophet challenged the people to three simple and yet profound steps: “Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.” These are the three components of the renewal of their faith: Do, love and walk. God’s justice is not a tit-for-tat type of justice. It is a holistic way of looking at all of society and for all people with their different abilities and needs. As for love, this is another big concept because it is not just any love. It is steadfast love. The Hebrew word for love, *hesed*, means unfailing, never-ending and steadfast love. This is love we are called to, a love that will never let the other go. The third part which is “to walk humbly with your God” is not about feeling bad about ourselves and letting go of our needs. This is often what we associate with humility. As biblical

scholar Walter Brueggemann points out in the biblical sense humbleness produces wisdom according to Proverbs 11:2. Walking humbly means being open to the great wisdom of God in our lives instead of only focusing on our knowledge. Pride often leads us to believe that we know it all and we don't need any input from anyone else, not even God.

What does this mean for us as we try to fulfill God's dream in the world? I don't claim to know all the answers, but I do know the way! I know that following the wisdom of the prophets like Micah and following in the footsteps of Jesus are the ways to fulfilling God's dream. God did not leave us orphaned or without guidance. The problem is that the voices and visions of our egos are often much more amplified than God's dreams which God implanted deeply in our souls. Our work on the journey of faith is to amplify the dream of God for our world and to dedicate our lives to fulfilling it.

In his book, *Change the World*, Mike Slaughter, writes, "True church growth is not about how many people attend each weekend. The true greatness of any local church is measured by how many people serve the marginalized. Jesus had a church of only 120 members when he left planet earth. By most church growth standards, this membership would be deemed utter failure. But Jesus used a very different measure...His followers...understood that the mission was not to get the world into the church but to get the church into the world. The business of the church is to engage and empower disciples of Jesus in meeting the needs and closing the gaps of disparities for the least of these. Religion that honors God is religion with feet."

Religion with feet is about living with God's dream as our North Star. Here is an overview from Jean Vanier of God's dream for humanity:

<https://youtu.be/dEqQLo2HBV4>

God's dream according to Vanier is that we all become one! He writes, "To become fully human is to let down the barriers, to open up and discover that every person is beautiful. Under all the jobs you're doing, responsibilities, there is you. And you, at the heart of who you are, you're somebody also crying out, 'does somebody love me?' Not just for what I can do, but for who I am...Before being Christians or Jews or Muslims, before being Americans or Russians or Africans, before being generals or priests, rabbis or imams, before having visible or invisible disabilities, we are all human beings with hearts capable of loving."

Today we are beginning a discipleship adventure where we are all invited to be secret agents of God's dream. We are playing this as a game, but we are hoping that it will become a way of life for each of us. As you walked in today, you received a secret identity. That is your discipleship identity until the end of October. Learn more about your identity and find others to journey with you. Each week we will be challenged to complete a quest. This week's quest is to find a symbol or an image of God's dream for the world. The image/symbol does not need to be something big. The focus is on what helps ignite your passion. Turn to your neighbors and begin this quest together. Let God bring to your attention something that will capture your imagination.

This will help prepare us to answer the question about how God is calling you to change the world: If you could do anything for God, what would it be? First, we have to start with God's dream and then we will see where we fit in it.

I would like to end with the words of Desmond Tutu in his book *God Has a Dream*:
“You are the indispensable agent of change. You should not be daunted by the magnitude of the task before you. Your contribution can inspire others, embolden others who are timid, to stand up for the truth in the midst of a welter of distortion, propaganda, and deceit; stand up for human rights where these are being violated with impunity; stand up for justice, freedom, and love where they are trampled underfoot by injustice, oppression, hatred, and harsh cruelty; stand up for human dignity and decency at times when these are in desperately short supply. God calls on us to be his partners to work for a new kind of society where people count; where people matter more than things, more than possessions; where human life is not just respected but positively revered; where people will be secure and not suffer from the fear of hunger, from ignorance, from disease where there will be more gentleness, more caring, more sharing, more compassion, more laughter, where there is peace and not war.” Amen.