

Sometimes, the readings from the lectionary seem to line up with what is happening in the world around us. We have two powerful passages of scripture that remind us what is at the heart of our faith. First there is Micah 6 – the words are so familiar. “He 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 walk humble with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

Sometimes, when the words are so familiar it is helpful to hear them spoken in new ways. Here is the translation from *The Message* “But he’s already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It is quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour; be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don’t take yourself too seriously –take God seriously.” (Micah 6:8)

Why was it necessary for Micah to remind people what was important? The people were doing all the right things. They went through the motions of following in God’s ways. But it was just actions and nothing more. God decides to put the people on trial with the mountains as

judge. God treated the people with mercy but they do not remember it. God begins his opening statement: "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! 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." (Micah 6:3 – 4) In turn the people question God, "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? 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?" (Micah 6:6 – 6:7)

All of these are the most amazing offerings, each offering greater than the one before. The average citizen would eat meat once a month – to offer a calf a year old was like offering a large part of their income – thousands of rams would have been a near impossibility for most citizens. Rivers of oil? Not a chance. Kings and royalty often made such extravagant sin

offerings but that did not change their heart or their actions. God counters with a request that seems so simple. God says through the prophet Micah, “and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8) “It is quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour; be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don’t take yourself too seriously –take God seriously.” (Micah 6:8)

All week these words have been running through my mind. Then I hear of a news ban on refugees and people travelling from seven Muslim countries and I wonder how this can be? There are stories of people who’ve lived in the United States for years with homes, families and jobs detained in airports around the world. There are rumours that there will be an executive order that will force Muslims to register. I find myself in a state of shock. That refugees, people who are already suffering, people who’ve been cleared through an extensive security vetting are now deemed a threat. It seems so far from the justice and

compassion that is at the heart of Micah's message.

Then you add to that conversation Jesus' reading from the Beatitudes – a portion of the sermon on the Mount. In Matthew's gospel this does not take place in front of gathered crowds. It is just Jesus and the disciples. He begins by teaching the disciples what it means to be blessed. We have to be careful here – blessing in the gospels is not necessarily how we use the words.

Sometimes, when everything is going well, we call it a blessing. Sometimes people who have plenty of everything – they describe themselves as blessed. Perhaps if you've reached the top of your profession you'd say you're blessed. Perhaps you've had a gathering of friends and you say blessed. I know I've said it.

But then take a look at our reading and it sure isn't how Jesus used the word. Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed

are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3 – 11)

The blessings of God’s kingdom are for all – for each and every one of us. They are the blessings that will sustain us in the most challenging of times. The Beatitudes are a reminder that God blesses us in our weakness and times of challenge. God calls us to be a blessing to others. That means providing welcome, shelter and hope to those in need. It means welcoming refugees fleeing from danger. It means standing up for those whose voices has been silenced.

The invitation to bless others, to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God is not one we can take lightly in these days of rising racism. The call to seek justice is not

something we do alone. All around us people are raising their voices. Canada has agreed to welcome all the refugees turned away by the ban. The United Church of Christ – our partner church in United States along with others faith communities are raising their voices to keep the doors open to refugees. The Mayor of Boston promised to offer sanctuary in the city of hall to refugees and immigrants affected by this ban.

In these bold actions, I am reminded that living out our faith is an invitation to draw the circle wide – to provide welcome to everyone. A living faith invites us to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God. As we do this God's kingdom of love becomes a reality. Amen.