

Come to Church, or Be the Church?

Micah 6:1-8

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What would you think if I asked you to get up and leave? How would you respond if I asked you to go and get into different groups... that we were going to leave here and go to one of 20 different places around the area and that we were going to do the work of church in those places... a nursing home with residents waiting to be wheeled outside for fresh air, a single mother with three small children anxious to go the park, a food bank with cases of food needing to be stacked, a small church in a dying neighborhood with thirteen people in worship and no choir, a community closet with clothes that needed to be folded, dirty windows to be washed, walls that needed paint. Would you get up and go?

Look at what I found online. (show slides 1-3) Scattered across America are communities of faith whose members don't just go to church- they work to be the church. There's an organization- headed by an author and pastor of a huge Presbyterian church in Menlo Park, California, who's calling for a national "Faith in Action Sunday," with a website titled, "Put Your Faith in Action.org." Would something like that ever work at Crestview? (close first 3 slides)

This morning's scripture passage is a classic Old Testament passage, and part of the Bible that includes the prophetic writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and a bunch of smaller books. One of the constant prophetic messages was a call to the nation Israel to be true to its heritage, and to obey the call of God to practice justice and live rightly.

What had happened was a division of wealth that left the rich getting richer, and the poor getting poorer. The Bernie Madoffs of the day were making a killing, and the shekels were coming out of the pockets of the poor. The rich had over-the-top lavish lifestyles, while the rest scratched around for a living. It wasn't hard to notice all the sleek camels lined up at the temple as the rich folks went about their religious duties, and the hypocrisy of the wealthy tossing a coin or two into a beggar's basket on the way in was more that some could stomach. One of those was Micah- who began to speak in the same tradition of the other prophets like Amos and Hosea, and used a particular format to do so.

He filed what is called a “riv,” or a lawsuit against the Hebrew people for betraying their covenant relationship with God. He calls on all of creation to witness what was going on: the mountains, the hills, the foundations of the earth. Creation is the jury, the prophet is the prosecuting attorney and you're on trial. God is a good God... look at all the things God has done for you... redeemed you out of slavery, brought you out of Egypt, sent you Moses, and Aaron and Miriam, and guided you across the desert. Look at the self-serving way you're acting now- is it anywhere close to God's “love your neighbor” way of living, or his “look after the least of these” directives? Do you think you can show up in church every now and then, throw a few bucks in the plate, and that'll keep God satisfied? Here's what we read in Micah's indictment, along with God's response: (show slide #4)

¶ With what shall I come before the LORD
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

¶ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

* He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

From Micah's point of view- all the liturgical correctness in the world is meaningless unless it's connected with moral integrity. I'd like to suggest to you today that its no different for us... whether a large church or a small fellowship, some church out west or back east, a contemporary worship service or traditional... worship without some sense of acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with our Lord... our faith will be little more than what the Apostle Paul calls resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. In 1 John, we are urged to not love with words or tongue but with actions and truth. James concludes his second chapter with this blunt observation: "faith without deeds is dead."

These are pretty strong words, but I think they point us toward something very important- even hopeful. I'd like to suggest today that as you and I find ways to flesh out the love of God... make it incarnational... we are tapping into something very significant... Christ-like. At Christmas, we celebrate the incarnational love of God made flesh in a tiny baby; as disciples of that Christ, we celebrate the love of God whenever we seek to live it out ourselves... Christ in us, and us in Christ. In that effort, there is blessing... not just for the one being served, but for the one who seeks to serve.

Our Adventure of Faith effort includes setting aside a portion of the money that you and I pledge to create an mission incubator... a pot of money that will be used to help us flesh out mission ideas... large or small. Somebody once started Reach Out Lakota in her garage; someone began to rally folks to go to New Orleans; somebody decided to do something to help out a struggling church down in Over the Rhine called Hope Temple; someone had a vision to bring a basketball ministry from down South

known as Upward Basketball; a friend of mine back in Denver, CO named Luis Villareal determined to do something to help young kids develop reading skills that would keep them in school long enough to graduate from high school. He was the founder of a program we're now involved in here in West Chester. It's called Whiz Kids, and some people from Crestview were among those who kicked it off at Hopewell Elementary 2007. The program is growing explosively enough to gain the attention of Tricia Mackey on Channel 3. Take a look at this:

[Show Whiz Kid Video](#)

Last year, we moved over to Adena Elementary and I'm convinced our efforts are part of what helped Adena move up two categories in the school rankings to the "excellent with distinction" level. Among the 15 or so Crestview folks who helped out this past year was Alex Pilcher, and I'd like for her to tell you a bit about her experience...**Alex** ([put up the slides of Alex and her kid Tanner](#))

Thanks, Alex. ([close slides of Alex' kid](#)) Connie and I are both going to volunteer again as a Whiz Kids tutor; if you want to do that as well, check with Jean Haynes or Judy Turner... or simply visit with Alex... she'll be sure you get involved.

That may not be your thing; it isn't for everybody. What is your thing... is doing God's thing, and God has something for you. ([if you have an Adventure of Faith logo-show slide here](#)) If you're not already involved in the big celebration two weeks from now- do something. If you've not already begun to consider the level of financial support you plan to pledge to our church's Adventure of Faith effort- I encourage you to begin to

pray about it. You and I are asked to make tangible our support for the church... and I believe you'll find blessing in doing so. (close Adventure of Faith logo)

Meanwhile... somehow... someway... some Sunday... you'll be among those to tell your friends and family that you don't just GO to church... you ARE the church... to the glory of God!