

Guiding Lights

5-25-25

(Micah 6; Galatians 3; Luke 3)

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If you had a look through the worship insert, you may be wondering why the hymn after the sermon is “We Three Kings,” given that it isn’t Christmas time. Well, early in the week I decided that, for my last sermon, I would ignore the seasons and schedules and pick scripture passages that have been guiding lights for me; like the stars in the sky that drew the wise men to Jesus.

And I thought that I should also tie them into a reflection on Memorial Day.

Micah 6:8

The first reading from the Prophet Micah is a remarkable passage because of the way it puts in a nutshell, what makes up a person of sound character. Chapter 6 verse 8 says: “What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.”

This verse makes it clear that what God expects of us isn’t “rocket science.” **Just people** play by the rules and don’t cheat or carve out exceptions for themselves. They treat everyone fairly.

“Love kindness” tells us that God expects more of us than just following the rules of fairness. It means we are to put our hearts into the way we keep them to the point where they overflow with generosity. It means rejoicing when others thrive and taking no pleasure in punishing them for their wrongs.

And “being humble” means not elevating ourselves above others, as though we are somehow more precious, more deserving or omniscient. The joy of those who are humble is in the blessings that fall to us from the God who walks beside us. Humble people are not quick to have all the answers, but wait, like a cup half full; always ready to receive new understandings, to own up and be corrected when they are wrong. Humble people are never quick to point the finger of blame elsewhere.

This verse is a true guiding star for those who know the importance of character formation. And my view is that, if we truly want to be patriots and honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice for us; the best thing we can do is participate in our democracy as people who embody the good character God requires: by being as just, kind and humble as we can.

Luke 3 with John the Baptist

Another guiding star on this morning's road to Jesus comes from the mouth of John the Baptist in the Gospel reading. I chose it because, as a forerunner for Jesus, John tells us how we too can prepare the way for his coming. We are to make straight the path into this world for our King, who is the divine love of God. And we must be clear that we are talking about the pathway that leads through our hearts. And the work of clearing that path is done through our "baptisms into a life of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

This, to me, is the heart of John the Baptist's message to us. As a preparation for the coming of our Savior, we are to practice our baptisms through lives marked by repentance and forgiveness. In other words, for you and I and this hurting world to know the salvation that comes to us when God's love passes unhindered through our hearts and out into the world, we must be baptized (or should I say "drowned") in the waters of repentance and forgiveness.

I'm putting all this in high and "religious" sounding words. But repentance and forgiveness are really basically hard honest work; like putting our shoulders to some boulders that are pretty hard to budge.

Repentance means taking an honest look at our own ugly parts: our cowardly acts, our selfish deeds, the ways we have hurt others and then owning up; not just to ourselves but to the people we have hurt and saying, "I'm sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me. What can I do to show my sincerity?"

Repenting involves not just saying these words. We have to mean them and we have put all we have into not flipping our apologies over into something self-serving or manipulative. When we are wrong, we are wrong. Simple as that. We have to own it and do the right thing, even if it hurts.

And if it happens that you or I are the one who was wronged, we are to practice forgiveness and turn away from the desire to strike back. We are to move toward letting the resentments go, so that finally we can end up wanting the best for the person who hurt us. This is hard work that requires self discipline, honesty and courage. It is the way

we remove the boulders in our hearts and make the way smooth for God's love to pass through us into the world.

This Gospel reading is another guiding star in scripture to move us forward in our journey to that sacred place where Christ we can be one with Christ. It is purifying work by which we can cleanse ourselves and our nation of the bitterness and hatred that threatens to destroy us. And so I believe that it is also patriotic work that honors the fallen.

Galatians 3

A third guiding star I'd like to point to this morning is a passage that contains a verse that some wise individual put in the narthex of this church for all to see as they enter the sanctuary. It is the passage from Galatians that contains the words:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

This statement of humbleness that dovetails with the call to be humble in Micah 6:8. And with it, Paul kicks out from under us anything we might use as a pedestal to elevate ourselves above

others. It states the plain truth that there is no hierarchy of value that separates us from each other in the eyes of God. God's love is like the sky to which our steeple points; it extends forever without lines of separation and God's blessings, like the rain, fall from the heavens on the evil and the good alike.

In God's eyes there are there is no such thing as people who are less precious than ourselves. We all descend from Adam and Eve and we share their biology. And if we truly understand this, it means that when a bomb falls on a home anywhere in the world or a child dies from neglect, we should understand that it has fallen on our kin! And the fear, the pain and the suffering is no different than what we feel when we are victimized.

The faith described in Galatians is a universal faith based on a love that is not limited by boundaries or categories of any kind. And I believe that loving less discriminately as God does is also an important way of being a patriot and honoring the fallen.

Well, this is my last sermon to you. Thank you for allowing me the privilege of speaking to you from this pulpit for these past several years. Where my words have conveyed God's intentions, I am

grateful, and where they have not, I thank God for your ability to see more deeply. Every church I have been in has been in some ways a hidden jewel and source of inspiration to me. And I will cherish my time as part of your fellowship as one of the jewels in my heart for a long time to come.