



*I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all
generations.*

*I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.*

*You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn to my servant David:*

*'I will establish your descendants forever
and build your throne for all generations.'"*

*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.*

The Psalms were the songbook of ancient Israel,
the prayers they sang to their God as they gathered in worship.
Yet in our reading from the prophet Micah,
God accuses God's people of forgetting to live out
what they express in their worship.

The people have forgotten the covenant God made with him.
They have forgotten what God has done for them –

bringing them out of slavery in Egypt into the promised land
where God has been faithful in caring for them.

So God is making a complaint against God's people, as in a court of law,
and God calls on the mountains and hills, the very foundations of the earth,
to be God's witnesses against the people of Israel.



The people have fallen out of right relationship with God,
and with one another.

They act selfishly,

building up wealth and power at the expense of others,
forgetting the ways of justice and care God requires of God's people.

Micah has already told them that God is not interested in their worship,
with its ritual and song,
unless they are also living out the mercy and care God has given them.

In verse seven, the people's response to God makes it clear
that they do not understand God's complaint.

They ask, with increasing irony,

What more do you want from us, God?

We have done the prescribed offering - do you want more?

1,000 rams? 10,000 rivers of oil?

Shall we offer you our firstborn, to appease your anger?

And Micah tells them:

God has told you – again and again God has told you –
what God expects from you.

To do justice – to care for the most vulnerable, be their voice and support.

To love kindness – to share the faithful loving-kindness God has shown them.

And to walk humbly with God –

to accept their dependence on God for their very lives,

to follow in God's way and live in community according to God's mercy.

Right worship alone is empty, unless it is lived out in life –

unless it is expressed by right relationship with neighbors, with strangers,
with orphans and widows and all who are in need.

What Micah describes to the people of Israel,

Jesus models for his followers.

Jesus shows us what it means to walk humbly with God in all things.

Jesus shows us that to live in faithfulness to God means

living a life rooted in justice and compassion, mercy and loving-kindness.



Jesus is teaching in the Temple one day

when the religious leaders try to set a trap for him.

They come to him with a woman who, they say,

they have caught in the very act of adultery.

“The law of Moses demands such a woman be stoned,” they say.

“So, Jesus, what do you think we should do?”

If Jesus lets her go, he is clearly setting aside Jewish law once again.

If he decides she should be stoned, he lacks mercy; lacks proper legal procedure;

and may be open to charges of sedition

because only Rome can use capital punishment.

They think they have Jesus caught in a no-win situation.

The woman is simply a pawn they are using.

Who knows if their accusations are true, if she is guilty –
she is simply an unfortunate woman they are using for their own gain.

How does Jesus respond?

He stoops down, and begins to write or draw in the dirt.

He simultaneously takes attention off the woman onto himself,
and declines to engage in the conflict the religious leaders seek.

I imagine all attention turning to Jesus.

Everyone becomes still and quiet, waiting for his response.

Jesus stands and says,

“Let anyone who is without sin throw a stone at this woman.”

He effectively holds a mirror to each person standing there,
showing them their own sin.

Then he bends down again and begins to write in the dirt.

And one by one, each one walks away.

The ones who had been listening to Jesus teaching.

The ones who had watched the woman being dragged to the temple steps.

Even the religious leaders cast down their eyes and walk away.

Jesus shows them a different justice than blame and retribution.

He neither holds to a legalistic use of the law, nor sets aside the law,
but broadens the application of the law to each person present.

The only ones remaining are the accused woman, and Jesus.

Jesus stands and says,

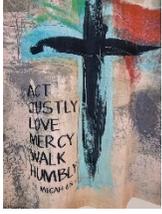
“Where did everyone go? Did no one stay to condemn you?”

And the woman replied, “No one, sir.”

And Jesus looks at her with love, and tells her to go on her way,
and not to sin again.

He does not say, “I forgive you,” but he offers her the new beginning
which is the outcome of forgiveness.

He offers her a justice which is filled with mercy.



This story invites us to look into the mirror Jesus conjures – asking ourselves when we have accused others yet avoided looking at our own sin.

It invites us to consider the mercy and loving-kindness of God, offered to all the world – and even to us.

We remember the words of Micah – that true faithfulness to God is found in acts of justice and mercy, in a life filled with loving-kindness.

We remember that we have been shown mercy, forgiven of our sins, and beloved by God.

We remember that we can practice walking humbly with God, following in the ways of Jesus, by practicing justice rooted in mercy, and treating our neighbors with loving-kindness.

We love because God has first loved us.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.