

God Helps Us Carry the Weight

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Micah 6:1-8

Psalm 15

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Matthew 5:1-12

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

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St Andrew's Episcopal Church, Sedona, AZ

Opening Versicle

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 to walk humbly with your God? - Micah

Introduction

Some weeks it feels as though every one of us is walking around with a backpack we didn't choose to carry. And each time the world breaks a little more another stone gets dropped inside.

We don't always notice the first few stones. We tell ourselves we can manage. We tighten the straps, shift our weight, and keep going. But eventually there comes a week when the weight becomes undeniable — when the backpack digs into our shoulders and we realize we are carrying more than our hearts were made to hold alone.

This week alone has added more weight than most of us know how to hold. The killing of Alex Pretti in Minnesota by an ICE agent — a stone of grief. Escalations of immigration enforcement in Arizona — a stone of fear. The relentless attacks on Gaza, and Hamas's ongoing terrorism — a stone of anguish. The grinding war in Ukraine and Russia — a stone of exhaustion.

None of these stones is small. And together... they make the backpack feel unbearably heavy. We feel it in our bodies — the tension in our necks, the fatigue that lingers even after rest. We feel it in our prayers — when words come slowly or not at all. We feel it in the quiet moments when we're honest enough to admit that the world is not as it should be.

And when the weight grows like this, we begin to ask questions: Where is God in all of this? What does God expect of us? How do we live faithfully when the world feels so fractured?

Part 1: Micah Speaks

It's into this moment — with our backpacks full and our shoulders aching — that the prophet Micah speaks. Micah looks at a world cracking under injustice and asks the people of God to remember who they are. He calls them back to the heart of God: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly.

Micah is speaking to a people who have lost their way. Their society is marked by corruption, exploitation, and violence. Leaders have failed them. Systems meant to protect have instead harmed. The vulnerable have been pushed aside. The powerful have forgotten compassion.

Micah's world is not so different from ours. As we gather for worship this morning and hear Micah's call, we do so in a week marked by grief and heaviness.

Horrific events in our nation and our world have shaken us. It has impacted communities around the world, and many in our local communities, especially our immigrant neighbors. Some are afraid to leave their homes. Some are afraid to go to work. Some are afraid to take their children to school.

The fear is real... and it is heavy.

Bishop Reddall, in her E-pistle this week reminds us that these events are not isolated. They are symptoms of deeper systemic failures: broken immigration laws, eroded trust, blurred lines between protection and harm. When families live in fear, followers of Jesus are called to be witnesses to the Gospel — not in theory, but in the lived reality of our neighbors.

So the question arises: What does God ask of us when the backpack feels too heavy to carry?

Part 2: Micah's Invitation

In today's first reading from the prophet Micah, God asks the people, "What have I done to you? How have I burdened you?" This is not accusation. This is invitation — an invitation to honesty, to self-examination, to remembering the covenant that binds us to God and to one another.

God is not scolding the people. God is calling them back to relationship. Micah speaks to a society where injustice has become normal, where leaders have failed, where the vulnerable are suffering, where people have forgotten the shape of God's life.

Micah's world is not so different from ours.

And into that world, God speaks a word that is both simple and demanding: Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly with your God.

This is not a checklist. It is not a spiritual to-do list. It is a way of being — a way of carrying the weight of the world with God and with one another, rather than alone.

Faith is not an escape from the world's pain. Faith is the courage to face it — with God.

Part 3: Lament: The First Step Toward Justice

How do we begin to allow God to help us carry this weight?

Palestinian Episcopal Priest, Rev. Naim Ateek writes, “We have to begin by crying out for justice. You build peace on justice.” Lament is not a detour from faith — it is the doorway into it. Lament is how we take the stones out of the backpack and name them. Lament is how we refuse to pretend that everything is fine. Lament is how we honor the truth of suffering.

Jesus himself lamented. He wept for those who suffered. He wept for those who caused suffering. He wept over Jerusalem because violence and injustice had hardened the hearts of its leaders. He wept for his own persecutors.

Lament is not weakness. Lament is love refusing to be silent.

As followers of Jesus, we do not turn away from suffering. We do not rush past the pain or explain it away. We begin, as the prophets teach us, by lamenting. We name the wrong. We grieve the loss. We hold before God the life that has been taken and the lives that have been forever changed.

And we pray for everyone — on every side — because injustice harms the whole fabric of society, and God’s mercy knows no limitations.

Scripture reminds us that ultimate justice belongs to God. “Vengeance is mine, and recompense,” says the Lord, in the Book of Deuteronomy.

Paul echoes this in Romans: “Do not retaliate. Do not mirror the harm. Ground your actions in God’s justice and mercy.”

This does not mean silence. This does not mean passivity. It means our work for justice is rooted in God’s character, not in our anger.

Part 4: Jesus and the Beatitudes

As a member of the Jewish community, Jesus stands firmly in the prophetic tradition. When he climbs the mountain in Matthew’s Gospel and begins to teach, he is not offering a list of virtues or moral achievements. He is revealing the very heart of God.

Jesus knew Micah’s cry. Jesus prayed Micah’s words. Jesus carried Micah’s vision of justice, mercy, and humility in his bones. So when he opens his mouth and says, “Blessed are...” he is not describing the world as it is. He is describing the world as God intends it to be.

The Beatitudes are Jesus’ way of saying: “God sees the weight you carry. God honors the tears you shed. God blesses the work you do for justice. And God walks with you in the struggle.”

Blessed are the poor in spirit — those who feel empty, depleted, stretched thin. Blessed are those who mourn — those who refuse to numb themselves to the world's pain. Blessed are the meek — those who choose gentleness over domination. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness — those who long for a world where justice is real. Blessed are the merciful — those who choose compassion over cruelty. Blessed are the peacemakers — those who step into conflict with courage and love.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus is not giving us a checklist. He is giving us a portrait of God's kingdom. He is giving us a way to live when the world is falling apart. He is giving us a path rooted in the prophets and embodied in his own life.

As Episcopalian followers of Jesus, we vow to respect the dignity of every human being — immigrants, asylum seekers, law-enforcement officers, and all who are affected by these events.

Dignity requires compassion. Dignity requires accountability. Dignity requires us to see the image of God in every person — even when fear or anger tempts us to look away. Even when we want to pick up a rock and throw it.

Even those whose actions we oppose are still bearers of God's image.

And so in this moment, we are invited:

- to stand with those who are afraid,
- to speak clearly when systems harm rather than protect,
- to pray for all who suffer and all who serve,
- to love even those we might consider enemies.

This is what it means to walk humbly with God.

Part 5: God Helps Us Carry the Weight

I began with the image of a backpack filled with stones — the griefs, fears, and injustices of this week and this world.

The truth is, God does not promise to take the backpack away. God does not promise to remove every stone.

But God does promise this: we do not carry it alone. Lament is how we take the stones out, name them, and lay them before God. And when we do, something holy happens.

God bends down beside us. God places a hand on the straps. God lifts with us, as we lift with one another. The weight may not disappear. But it becomes bearable — because God is bearing it with us, as we work and pray with one another.

Conclusion

This is the hope we have in Jesus: that the God who blesses the poor in spirit, the God who comforts those who mourn, the God who hungers for justice, the God who makes peace — is the God who shoulders the weight of the world alongside us and with us.

May we have the courage to lament, the strength to seek justice, the humility to walk with God, and the trust to let God carry the weight with us.

And in so doing, may we become the peacemakers we are called to be.

Amen.