

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 4
...Committed, pt 2

Micah 6: 6 - 8

**I had to chuckle last week between services as someone said to me, "So, I see you got HeyYoung to do 'the money sermon' this year." It was a light hearted comment, but after I thought about it, it occurred to me that it was really an affirmation of how little we focus on money here in this church. "*The*" money sermon pretty much puts it in perspective. And, maybe I should add, too, that Pastor HeyYoung *volunteered* to do that message (I was so proud of her!) and also that I thought it was spot on... a Bible- based challenge to tithe, yet a message steeped in Grace, not law. Well done!

Although both of us mention money, stewardship, etc. on a fairly regular basis in our various messages, because this is part of our discipleship, we truly do seldom take most of any one message to lift that subject up - pretty much just once a year - intentionally because we are always looking to bring new people into this community of faith, help them feel comfortable, and we know (just as you do) that the perception of the church to many people 'on the outside' is that *all* we care about is getting your money.

If you've been here for any length of time, and are paying attention at all, you already know that nothing could be further from the truth. On the other hand (and this is what I thought HeyYoung expressed so well) our giving (i.e., the challenge to tithe, in particular) is a Scriptural expectation for those who are filled with God's love. I do totally agree with her statement that 'God will not come after people who do not tithe', God will not punish you, or consider you lesser citizens in the Kingdom, because none of us come to God on the basis of our works - that's the beauty of Grace.

Bill Hybels, senior leader at Willow Creek Church, on the other hand, made a statement years ago that has not only stayed with me, but I've seen evidence of its truth in action in my life and in many others as well. It went something like this: "There is a level of Spiritual maturity and blessing that we simply cannot reach, unless we are *fully* committed as disciples of Jesus Christ." And that full commitment must include our regular, systematic, generous giving.

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 4 ...Committed, pt 2

I believe he's right, we will just hit a wall in our spiritual growth, in our satisfaction in life, in our wholeness as human beings, if we've given 'everything to God *except* our finances'. And that's not even to mention that the ministries that take place here, and around the world - ministry and witnesses that we value - obviously, *can't* continue without funds.

So, we will continue to encourage you to pray, and follow God's leading in your financial decisions, even though, to be quite honest with you - I'm tempted to beg! - as we are struggling right now financially, in our church. We have been faithful stewards of what you've entrusted to us over the years, our budget has hardly moved over the past four years, in spite rising health care costs, energy, etc., and our ministries are thriving... but our giving keeps getting tighter and tighter... we have virtually no financial cushion right now, and we constantly hold bills, deciding what to pay now and what can wait. And honestly, it is very stressful, among other problems. So, we're hoping and praying for another strong end to this year, as in the last two. I hope you consider all this in your year-end giving, and plans, and in your Christmas lists, and especially in your prayers.

** ...And that's all I have to say about that.

HeyYoung's message on giving last week was part of the revisiting of our mission statement, particularly focusing on the word, '*Committed*'. What does it mean to be *committed* to sharing the love of Jesus Christ? She talked about being committed in our giving - our money, and our time.

I'm not going to talk any more about giving today (I don't think) but I want to come at that same word from a little different perspective. This (tomorrow) is a special day in the life of the church (All Saints Day). This is the day when we reflect on the 'great communion' - the unity, the connection of *everyone* who has stood up and claimed the name of Jesus Christ as the foundation of their lives. In the historic Apostle's Creed we say this line at the end -

** *I believe in the Holy catholic [i.e., universal] Church, and the communion of the saints...*

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 4
...Committed, pt 2

The communion of the saints is just what I mentioned - that there is a holy, mysterious, powerful, real, connection between all believers in Christ. A connection that bridges vast distances, languages, nations, cultures, and even transcends time itself. We have a connection with those who have gone before us, and we honor their memories, acknowledging the debt that we owe them for paving the way for us to practice our faith in Christ today, and we know that one great day we will all be reunited in the presence of our Lord.

And in a similar way, we have a connection as well with those yet to come - future generations who will look back with gratitude at those of us who have lived and died faithfully... in order to pass along the spiritual treasures that we ourselves have enjoyed for so long.

You know, there have always been divisions and disagreements in the Church - there have always been differing ideas about the specifics of what we should believe, what we should do, how should we worship... and those discussions will continue until we see our Lord face to face.

**What the doctrine of the 'communion of the saints' reminds us of, is that wherever the church is found - from store front churches to home groups to great cathedrals, from stadium evangelism services to a quiet word of hope give over a cup of coffee in a late night diner; from prayer warriors interceding in their own prayer closets, to the 'doers' who roll up their sleeves and run health clinics, rebuild houses that were destroyed by Hurricane Sandy or in Appalachia, to those who serve meals in Camden or in our fellowship Hall to Interfaith Hospitality Network guests - from Africa to Asia, to Europe to... Moorestown... there is but ONE church. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. We are connected. We are ONE people!

There's a scripture reading that came to my heart, as I thought about all this, during the past week. Its a passage that for me, focuses on the part of our unity that is based, not so much on what we hold in common belief, but in our common *response* to our beliefs - i.e., what we *do* as the people of God.

**** Micah 6: 6 - 8**

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 4
...Committed, pt 2

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 olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
He has shown you, O mortal, 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.

I have found that I have a very high comfort level in being among Christians with whom I disagree on some theological issues when they give evidence of understanding this powerful word from the ancient prophet Micah: that what God is asking of us is that we "*...act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God...*"

As I think back on this All Saints weekend about the people no longer with us, people that come to my mind after nearly 20 years of ministry in this church - (and there are so many!) - what I remember of those folk is not their views on Eschatology. (I'll bet more than a few didn't even know that word!) I don't know what their theological ideas were concerning the nature of the Atonement, I don't know if they preferred 'propitiation' to 'expiation' (you get my drift?)... But I remember their humility. I remember their love to do what was right. I remember that they walked with their God. Didn't just 'talk the talk' but they 'walk the walk'.

And so many times, their walk and my walk overlapped... and we helped each other on the journey. I know that I have been the recipient of so much Grace, so much encouragement, such good examples that I will forever be in their debt. Their lives are a constant reminder to me of who I am, who I want to be, of what is important, of what lasts (and what doesn't). They make me want to be a better man, and to do everything I can to leave a better future for the next generation. So that down the line, someone just might look back on me (on us) and find the same inspiration.

Those who 'get' this, who truly hear what Micah was saying to the people of Israel (and, of course, to *us* as well) are living out an important Scriptural truth - whether they can express it ** in these words or not. And it is this: For a follower of God, *All life is an act of worship.*

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 4 ...Committed, pt 2

The Bible never gives us a formal definition of worship. But our English word "worship" comes from two Old English words: *weorth*, which means "worth," and *scipe* or *ship*, which means something like shape or "quality." We can see the Old English word ending some modern words like *friendship* and *sportsmanship* – that's the quality of being a friend, or the quality of being a good sport.

So worth-ship is the quality of having worth or of being worthy. When we worship, we are saying that God has worth, that he is worthy. **Worship means to declare worth, to attribute worth.** Or to put it in biblical terms, to praise God. And there are a number of ways to do that. The most obvious is that we speak, or sing, tell about how good and powerful God is. We publicly come together to 'worship' God - to declare God's worth to us.

** 1 Peter 2:9 says,

"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light".

We were called for the purpose of praising God, worshiping God. That is one of the job descriptions of a Christian. We should constantly declare that God is worthy, worth more than everything else put together. But that praise doesn't simply come in structured worship times - whether public or private. It *starts* there, but if that's all there is, then we don't have much. Because, really, isn't that what Micah was asking - 'what can I give you God? How can I worship you correctly - how can I rightly declare your worth? With burnt offerings, thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of olive oil? my firstborn?

Is this what God wants from me? And he says, "no, that's not it!"

Now, let's keep this in context - Those burnt offerings, the offerings of grain and olive oil, (even the firstborn - although by consecrating this child to God, not by sacrificing their life) - these all come from the OT worship instructions. In other words, they are instructions for worshipping *from God*. So, Micah isn't saying that God doesn't want us to participate in public displays of worship, or making our offerings, or any of that.

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 4 ...Committed, pt 2

God knows how much we need that constant reminder of who we are, and who we serve; we need to provide our encouragement to others who want to walk with us, we need to be reminded of the community of faith that we are part of by gathering together. We forget so easily! That's one reason it says in Hebrews 10:25,

** ...do not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

We need this time together, but what Micah is saying is that if all we do are those outward acts, no matter how elaborate and impressive they may be, if all we do is sing, and listen to a sermon, and go away feeling good about ourselves, we have accomplished very little when it comes to God's plan for our abundant living.

What else is God looking for? He tells us *...act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God...* This response is our worship, too. Just as much as singing praise songs, and putting a check in the offering plate.

In both Hebrew and Greek, there are two major groups of words describing worship. The first kind means to bow down, to kneel, to put one's face down as an act of respect and submission. In doing that, our body language is saying, "God, I will do whatever you want me to. I am ready to listen to your instructions and I am willing to obey."

The other kind of biblical word means to serve. About half of the time, these words are translated as *worship*, and the other half as *serve*. It carries the idea of *doing something for God* — making a sacrifice or carrying out his instructions.

** So **there is a worship that expresses the heart, and worship that involves the mind, and a worship that involves the body.** There is a worship that is giving praise upward, a worship that is receiving instructions from above (listening), and a worship that carries out our instructions in the world around us. Praising, listening, doing... This is similar to what we were

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 4
...Committed, pt 2

talking about some three weeks ago when we talked about the community of *faith* - we are people engaged in a dynamic relationship with the living God. Not static, not passive.

A community of faith recognizes that all of life is our worship - it is our offering to God. We *receive* from above (we listen); we *give* praise back to God through our words and our music, and we then, *go out* and serve, joyfully sharing the riches of God's glory with those around us. And in all these 'directions', folks, **we** are blessed!

We need all three types of worship. Praise is good, but if all we do is praise God, without ever listening to what he says, we have to ask whether we believe the words we are saying. In a similar way, all talk and no action does not show God the respect that God deserves. Actions speak louder than words, and if our behavior isn't changed by God, then our actions are saying that God isn't important — he's a nice idea, but not relevant to my day-to-day life.

*** So, true worship includes all our responses to God – a response with our mind, (i.e., our belief in God's worthiness), our emotions, (i.e. love and trust), and our words and actions.*

Every act of obedience is an act of worship. It declares that God has worth. Every time we hear God tugging on the strings of our hearts, and we say, "OK, Lord... I'm going to try this" we are worshipping, we are declaring God's worth.

And whenever we share the Good News with someone, we are declaring God's worth. We are giving worship in everyday life. We don't have to wait for a church service.

We see a similar thing in Philippians 4:18, which Paul wrote after receiving financial help from the Christians in Philippi:

FUMC Mission Statement Revisited, 4
...Committed, pt 2

** "I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." The people were worshipping with their money, which we can do with our offerings today, as well. (But I said I wouldn't talk about that anymore today!)

** As we join in remembering the Communion of Saints today - as we bow our hearts together at the Lord's Table that has been prepared for us, as we read the latest list of names of those that we will see no more, but whose memories and legacies have helped form such a strong foundation for our own lives, may we *never forget who we are* ... that we are a people set apart from the world in order to give God glory. To declare God's praise... God's worth. Through our words, and through our actions.