Micah 6:6-8 and Hebrews 13:12-16

"What does the Lord require?"

This day, World Communion Sunday, has a special place in my heart. Today is seen as the day throughout the year that Christians are unified around the table, around this sacrament where Jesus prays to the Father in John 17:11 that all of his disciples, and he knew that his disciples would be represented all over the world, would be one as he and the Father are one. He tells his disciples that they would be scattered after his death, and even though they are gathered together around the table after his death and in his resurrection, the scattering of his disciples is seen today in the world. Communion, the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, is a sacrament that can draw the church together.

I have had the privilege to take communion in over a dozen different countries with the same number of languages and in each place the people of God are gathered recognizing that what they do is bigger than they are, that what is happening within the walls is just a small reflection of what has happened and what God is doing outside of these walls. We can't allow communion to be just something that we do internally without recognizing that we are connected to a much larger body of Christ that speaks different languages than we do, that looks different than we do, that understands the presence of God differently than we do. That should not threaten us, it should give us encouragement and hope that God is at work, sometimes even in spite of us. That's why I love World Communion Sunday.

In those different settings all around the world I have used bread and matza juice and wine I have sat down in the pew, I have gathered in a circle, I have kneeled at a bench. There are so many different ways in which to celebrate this sacrament. And in every place where we have celebrated communion there is one underlying fact that has been the same: Jesus is present during communion. Now, we all believe differently in how he is present. In the Anabaptist tradition it is much more of a symbol, of a remembrance and not the sacrament that we see it as. In the Roman Catholic and Orthodox tradition it is much more of a physical presence where the juice and the bread becomes the blood and body of Jesus, a literal change in substance.

As Presbyterians we believe in the true, literal spiritual presence of Jesus in communion in a way that Christ is not presence without the sacrament. Jesus is truly present, in a spiritual way that is seen within the community, and not in each one of us individually, but in the presence of the community. While communion has the most potential to bring the church together, it

serves today, unfortunately, as the most present and pervasive sin that the church every Sunday continues to enact. Because there are some who either refuse communion to others or refuse to take communion from others, it is a sin against Jesus' command that we may be one. That is why we serve communion to all who come forward, understanding that we do not own this table, it belongs to Christ.

Communion takes place within the realm of worship and we have seen not that long ago that worship is the most important thing that we do together, and I mean together, in person, unified through the presence of the Holy Spirit, which is why worshipping with each other is so central to our faith. But worship is not the only thing. We heard the question in our first Scripture what is it that the Lord requires? The answer we find in both of our Scriptures today is that our worship has to be outward facing as opposed to inward facing. Our worship has to be less about self-preservation and more about justice, kindness, and humility. This new covenant which we have been given is different from the old where the old was to establish a people, it was about preserving a people, the new is about community building that reaches out to those who are the most in need. Let's read

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When we read the Old Testament Scripture of Micah one would think that it is fulfilling the command to make worship the most important thing in our life, to the point where there are extravagant offerings to the Lord to ensure that we are worshipping correctly. It would be like one who says I will give all my material goods, I will sell all that I have and give it to the Lord, is that sufficient for a sacrifice to follow the Lord? My worship and my giving reflects my relationship with the Lord. These offerings were not optional for the people of Israel, they were primary, and these verses reflect an offering that is extravagant, which should reflect and extravagant faith.

The religious leaders in Jesus' day would have been on board with these first verses in Micah for they would want these extravagant offerings because they would be the beneficiaries of them. So yes, go ahead and offer them, for it is your duty. But Jesus comes along and heals the crippled man on the Sabbath, turn to Matthew 12:12 which isn't really an offering, and the religious leaders lose their mind because Jesus was doing something that they considered not allowed on the Sabbath. But he says, it is allowed to do good on the Sabbath, no matter what we do, we are not breaking the law if we do good.

Micah, and our reading in Hebrews goes even further in saying that not only are we not breaking the law when we do good, but it is actually what the Lord requires. The Lord requires that our worship of him, that our time with him includes justice, kindness, and humility. That is not just a way to live your life, but it is your worship, it is what you offer to the Lord. Micah says to us, First Presbyterian Church of Strasburg, your worship has to be outward facing that demands action as opposed to inward facing worship that tries to secure self-preservation and our way of life.

We see that echoed in Hebrews 13, our final chapter, we only have one more sermon left in Hebrews. We are going to start from the end of our reading and work our way back. Look at vs. 16, do not neglect to do good, to share. We heard that phrase, do not neglect previously in 10:25 do not neglect to meet together, remember that, don't forget to gather together for worship. It all comes together. But these two phrases, do good and share are crucial because they span the extent of what we are capable of doing and what choose to do and not do.

Doing good incorporates a time commitment that we simply do not feel like we have. Sharing is also a commitment but that is of resources, which again many of us simply feel like we don't have. If all of our time is going back into our family, doing good to us simply means makings sure that my family has what they need, that is the extent of our doing good. If all of our finances are going back into our family, then we have neatly separated church and life in two separate buckets where the two shall never meet.

We read in vs.13 that we are to go outside of the camp, to go outside of our own walls because this earth, and this way of life that society and culture demands from us, that is not ours, that is not what we ought to claim. Philippians 3:20 tells us that our citizenship is in heaven, that is where our devotion ought to be. We are told not to get too comfortable in the city, or the setting in which we find ourselves, we are told to go outside of our walls, our worship, our time together has to be not self-preservation, but outward looking. Churches are not wired that way. We have an intrinsic nature as a church to self-preserve. That was the way of the Old Covenant, the people of Israel were focused on self-preservation, on keeping the people of God intact. That is not the way with the new covenant. The new covenant demands that we go outside of the walls, that our focus not be on ourselves but on others. That is the type of worship in which we ought to be involved in here and in our life.

Vs.15 reminds us to continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God. Worship is our sacrifice of praise, but we are called to a type of worship that demands our attention outside of these walls. Without the practical demonstration of love to others, the praise of God, or worship, lacks integrity. Jesus demonstrates to us that the place of Christians is not in holy places, but in the uncleanliness of the world. In Hebrews, and this specific passage where we are commanded to go outside of the gates, Christian identity is now a matter of going out to Jesus no matter where he may find himself. It is not about establishing programs and waiting for people to come, but rather going outside the gate to be where people are.

Our call, church, is in public view to worship, evangelize, emphatically serve the needy, and exercise generosity to others. Justice, kindness, humility, all of these things are outward facing, not inward facing. This is transformative for our community. Amen.