

## EVERYDAY SUNDAY

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Micah 6:1-8

Charles Foreman is 53 years old. He lives in Washington, D.C. By training, he is a corporate chef. However, during the pandemic, he was laid off from that job, as were so many who worked in the food services industry. Mr. Foreman took his layoff as an opportunity to do something insane. And by insane, I mean wonderful. Mr. Foreman opened up an ice cream shop. And he did so in the neighborhood where he had lived for 20 years. Mr. Foreman named his business *Everyday Sundae*. He spells Sunday SUNDAY—the ice cream spelling.

The neighborhood where he lives and works is called Petworth, and it is in Washington about 3 miles due north of the White House. Petworth is not the most affluent neighborhood in the District. It has seen its fair share of gun violence and crime. But Mr. Foreman wanted to “do something for the community.”

One of his store’s regular customers is a woman named Nicole. On Fridays, she brings her two children in for an after-school treat. Back in May, Nicole observed Mr. Foreman doing something insane. And by insane, I mean doing something that the owner of an ice cream shop probably shouldn't do. He was giving away ice cream. Nicole witnessed Mr. Foreman serving a free scoop to a child who didn't have the money to pay for it.

The following week, Nicole brought her children back for their weekly cones. She paid for them and then handed Mr. Foreman an envelope. And in the envelope was \$100—enough for about 28 cones of ice cream. Nicole instructed Mr. Foreman to use the money to give away ice cream.

Others had also witnessed Mr. Foreman's kindness and had also given him money. Word got around and people have donated hundreds of cones. Mr. Foreman gives them to kids. He also gives them to adults and seniors who might be going through a hard time. As he explains, “That's just part of being in the community. We're supposed to do all we can to help each other.”

Giving away ice cream is not all that Mr. Foreman does at his shop. He also offers free movie nights, storybook readings for kids, and clothes drives. Why does he do this? He says, “The little things that you do are the ripple effect on the pool. It matters.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2023/01/26/ice-cream-dc-everyday-sundae/>

Our scripture reading today is from the book of Micah. You no doubt recognized the end of the reading with its question, *What does God require of you?* and its answer, *do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God.* One scholar calls this vers “biblical ethics in a nutshell.” And I would agree. It’s all there. What does God want from us? Justice, kindness, and a sincere, humble relationship.

Unfortunately, we don’t know much about the prophet Micah. He was one of the four great prophets in Judah in the Eighth Century BC. We group him with Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea.

At the time of Micah’s ministry, Jerusalem was a prosperous city. The wealthy were getting wealthier. Large estates emerged as small farms were gobbled up. An economy based on trade and business was expanding. The gap between the wealthy and the poor was widening. Much of Micah’s words are focused on the growing economic injustices found within his nation.

Throughout the book of Micah, the prophet preaches against injustice and corruption. For example, in Chapter 2, we read, *Woe to those who plan iniquity... They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud people of their homes, they rob them of their inheritance.* (2:1-2, NIV). The wealthy are stealing from the poor.

In Chapter 6—our reading for today—Micah addresses the sins of the people against the Lord. He brings his argument in the context of a legal proceeding. Micah has already laid out the evidence of the people’s sins against God—how the wealthy defraud the poor and take their land and houses, how the system perpetuates growing economic injustices, how people pretend to be righteous at the same time that they are conducting evil, how the leaders take bribes and *despise justice and distort all that is right.*

This is the evidence Micah uses to bring God’s complaint against the people.

In our reading for today, Micah introduces this case to the jury. The jury is not people; the jury is creation itself. The jury is *the mountains, the hills, the foundations of the earth.* Creation will judge.

After Micah’s opening statement, God, as the plaintiff in this case, speaks. God asks, *O my people, what have I done to you? In what way have I wearied you? Speak to me. Your ancestors were slaves in Egypt and I saved them. Remember the incident with King Balak? I saved you from him. And when you were searching for a place to live, I gave you land. I have done this and so much more.*

God wants to know why the people have turned away. What grievance has God committed that they no longer honor God with their lives? Have they forgotten all that God has done for them?

Next, it is the people's turn to speak. But you will notice that they don't admit guilt; they don't confess their sins; they don't argue their innocence. Instead, what they do is seek to placate God with gifts and offerings. It is not bribery because they believe that they are doing the right thing, that this is what God wants.

The people bring this list of increasingly valuable offerings. They say, *With what shall I come before the Lord? Shall I come with burnt offerings? How about some year-old calves? What about a herd of thousands of rams? Or olive oil—would ten-thousand rivers of olive oil be enough?*

Finally, the negotiation comes to this: God, you drive a hard bargain. What about my first-born child. *Shall I sacrifice my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* These people don't confess; they don't show contrition; they just want to write a check and get make God happy.

This passage from Micah quite clearly employs the language of a court proceeding. But I'd like to look at this from a different angle. Lawsuit language is inherently antagonistic. There are winners and losers. Micah is making a point and making it well, but I would like to consider it in a different way.

Instead of viewing this as a courtroom proceeding, how about if we consider it as couples counseling. After all, we have two sides—two parties—who have been in a long-term relationship—a relationship that has broken down. One side has lost sight of what brought them together in the first place.

Now remember, this is not a romantic relationship; it is not a marriage between equals. It is a covenantal relationship between God and God's people. And God is deeply disappointed in the actions of the people. They have broken the covenant.

So, looking at it this way, we have Micah as the counselor, and he says, *Let us talk. Let us listen.* And God goes first asking this question, *What have I done to you? In what way have I become such a burden to you?* God points out all the good things that God has done for the people. *I brought you out of Egypt, I sent you priests and prophets to lead you. I protected you. I did all of these things to demonstrate my deep love for you. And yet it has come to this. How did this happen?*

The people then respond and they ask, *What is it that you want from us? We will give you anything you ask—burnt offerings, young calves, flocks of strong rams, olive oil, rivers of olive oil. We'll even sacrifice our first born child if you wish. Just tell us what you want. What is it that will make you happy?*

Can you see the rift in this relationship? Two sides with different understandings of how the other views the relationship. One asks for love and the other views commitment as a showering of gifts.

After each side has spoken, Micah, as counselor, responds. He reminds the people of the root of their relationship. He says, *God has told you, O mortal, what is good.* And in that simple sentence we can hear echoes of the creation story from Genesis. This word ‘mortal’ is a translation of the Hebrew word *’adam* (or Adam). The word means humanity. The word ‘good’ is the same Hebrew word we find in the creation story, *and God saw that it was good.* In other words, God has already established what God views as “good.” The terms of this relationship between God and the people have not changed. They are the same as they have been since creation. What is it that God asks for in this relationship? Does God want extravagant offerings? Does God desire lavish sacrifices? No. Those don’t reflect love for God. God wants what God has always wanted—for the people to live lives in complete and absolute commitment to their Lord.

God wants God’s people to do just three things: one, *do justice*; two, *love kindness*; three, *walk humbly with God.* God does not demand our extravagant gifts; God wants our hearts.

I’d like to share another story with you. This one takes place south of here down in Alabama in the town of Geraldine (pop. 910). It’s a farming community about 60 miles southeast of Huntsville. (The main street through Geraldine is Lebanon Road because there’s always a Lebanon connection.)

One resident of Geraldine was a man named Hody Childress. He served in the Air Force and retired from his job at Lockheed Martin in Huntsville. He had a wife and two kids. Sadly, his son and his father were killed in a tornado in 1973. Hody’s wife died of muscular sclerosis. However, he did remarry.

On New Year’s Day this year, Hody died. He had a heart condition. He was 80 years old. And when he died, everyone in town learned that Hody had a secret. It seems that every month, for the last 10 years of his life, Hody Childress would stop by Geraldine Drugs and give the owner a \$100 bill. He told the owner of the pharmacy to help those that could not afford their prescription. He said to the pharmacist, “Don’t tell a soul where the money came from. If they ask, just tell them it’s a blessing from the Lord.”

When Hody died, the pharmacist decided to tell his daughter about her father’s generosity. It turns out that Hody had already confessed this to her a few months earlier. His daughter shared the story at her father’s funeral.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Foreman, the owner of the ice cream shop, through his actions demonstrated kindness to his neighbors. As much as it grieves me to say this, ice

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2023/01/19/alabama-farmer-hody-childress-prescriptions/>

cream is not an essential food group. It is a delicious treat, but we do not need ice cream to survive. Sharing ice cream is a wonderful act of kindness.

Hody Childress, on the other hand, what he did was also kindness, but it was more. It was also justice.

Too often people define justice as retribution. “They hurt me, so I get to hurt them back.” That is rarely justice. That is just vengeance. Justice is seeking to bring equity to an unbalanced system. Justice is treating the poor and oppressed with compassion and fairness. Justice is seeking to rid a system of systemic inequalities. Hody Childress, in his way, was doing justice by helping people get the medications they needed. He was trying to balance the scales. Each of us should be appalled that in the wealthiest nation in the history of the world, that anyone should lack for life-saving medications.

These two stories are about people doing justice and demonstrating kindness. But they are also about all those who walk humbly with God. It’s not just Mr. Childress or Mr. Foreman, it is all the others who work with them—Nicole with her envelope, the pharmacist identifying those in need, others who also gave.

These are people who understand what it means to walk humbly with God. They aren’t seeking glory or adulation, they just do. They aren’t making grand gestures or lavish offerings. To walk humbly with God is to acknowledge that we are not equal to or above God, that we are God’s people. To walk humbly with God is to embrace God’s love for us and respond with our worship, our service, and our lives.

Walking with someone is different than walking next to or in front of or behind them. When we walk with someone, we must be mindful of their pace, we have to match step with them, we must be in tune with where they are going.

Walking humbly is not a box we can check off; it is a way of living. Instead of an offering of a thousand rams, walking humbly requires a thousand daily acts of generosity and love. Walking humbly means being with God constantly. It means making every day a Sunday.