

Micah 3: 5-12 Justice and peace, regardless of the cost. Can the church imagine such a thing? Can we picture the church working through its leaders for the common good as envisioned in Micah? Our Presbyterian 'leaders' have been at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing this past week on our behalf. Have we come even one step closer to the day when healing and reconciliation will be found in our country?

5 Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry "Peace" when they have something to eat, but declare war against those who put nothing into their mouths. **6** Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without revelation. The sun shall go down upon the prophets, and the day shall be black over them; **7** the seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame; they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God. **8** But as for me, I am filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin. **9** Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob and chiefs of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, **10** who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong! **11** Its rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, "Surely the Lord is with us! No harm shall come upon us." **12** Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

1 Thessalonians 2: 9 - 13. Where is deliverance found? It is found in the message of God. The Good News of Christ. A message preached and shared and lived. We sometimes have short memories of what other people have done for us; of what God has done for us, Paul reminds us that it is sometimes necessary to remind people of how God has delivered them in the past to give them the sure and certain hope that He will deliver them once more. **9** You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. **10** You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. **11** As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, **12** urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. **13** We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

Matthew 23: 1 - 12. This 'cheery' passage is entitled the 7 woes and is one of the great moments in the Gospels where Jesus is so frustrated and angry with the behaviour of the 'religious' that he just lets rip: they do not practise what they preach; they do everything for others to see; they love the place of honour at banquets, they love the most important seats in the synagogue; they love to be greeted in the market place and called 'Rabbi'. **1** Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, **2** "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; **3** therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. **4** They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. **5** They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. **6** They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, **7** and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. **8** But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. **9** And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. **10** Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. **11** The greatest among you will be your servant. **12** All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

Practice what you...

Madly off in all directions... that's how I feel this morning as we look to Proper 26 formerly known as the season of Pentecost, Reformation Sunday, All Hallows eve, All Saints Day and last but not least, the end of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings at the National event just down the street.

'Madly off in all directions' does not serve us well this or any other Sunday, so we'll take our cue from Micah and Jesus who seem to focus on religious leaders and religious observance and doing something as radical as encouraging us to "practicing what we preach."

Micah aims directly at those who use religion to mask their evil... and has no sympathy whatsoever for them. We're going to get back to that is just a few moments but let's listen in on Jesus first as he takes aim at those who say one thing, in this case representing the law and commandments handed down by Moses, we'd probably today call it the Torah, but then proceed to place burden upon burden and rule upon rule on the innocent while they themselves get all puffed up and take the best places and get the best of everything and demand to be called sir and mam and teacher... and I can't help reflecting on the stories I've heard since the beginning of my ministry at Waywayseecappo and have continued to hear this past week – and simply lament what was done by the church in the name of Christ to an unsuspecting people who at first thought they'd be treated with honour and respect and maybe even love by those who came in the name of the God of love... only to find ridicule, and prejudice and demeaning while being told they were savages and couldn't speak their own language and couldn't dress in traditional styles...all in the name of religion.

Micah talks about those who are spiritually bankrupt in verse 6, who have nothing to offer those who would listen to them. The First Nations' reflection on those who came to teach them and show them the truth is often as stark as what Micah has to say this morning. There is today no justification for what was done in the name of the church, in the name of Christ, in the name of Canada and we don't have to spend much time looking for one. We heard last week in worship in our reading from Thessalonians "so deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us." Yes, that's the way the gospel is to be shared and conveyed to people. When Grace Kim was reflecting on our Thessalonians passage for today, she reminded us that we embody the gospel we share – and then added: "As postcolonial theology reminds us, when proclaiming the gospel we must understand the dynamic of power and domination. Even if Christians are called to give something of themselves, they cannot do so thoughtlessly by entering a new land and dominating the people. Christians must understand the culture, religions and traditions of the other." I wonder where that attitude was when our government and our religious leaders imposed policies of assimilation upon the indigenous people of this land. But theology grows and matures by the grace of God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us that the only true form to follow is that of Jesus and we all seek to be transformed to be like him.

Just in case you are wondering and just in case you're thinking we've heard enough about this, just be reminded that that is exactly the same response experienced by Micah and Jesus. They didn't win friends and influence people with their words of accusation and condemnation. They were truth tellers and the truth was told though it cost them. For over fifty years, Micah travelled throughout the Kingdom of Judah, pointing out to the people how the Israelites had broken the covenant with God and urging the people of Judah to cast off the vices that entrapped them and seek to be as God-like in their lives as possible.

And when Jesus spoke as a truth teller, as he most certainly did in the passage this morning, they finally put him to death.

Let's take a closer look at what Jesus really says and why he is so incensed this morning.

Listen carefully to Jesus. He isn't attacking the teachings of the Pharisees... actually he begins by telling his followers to heed the teaching and follow it. More times than not, Jesus sides with the Pharisees, especially over against the Sadducees. On many points they agree. But when it comes to practicing what they preach Jesus is adamant that his followers not walk in their footsteps. Yes, they talk the talk but they don't walk the walk. And unless you walk the walk you are not to be believed.

How sad this past week when we found out just how many scout leaders have been convicted of various crimes against those entrusted to them. Here were the adult models for young boys and to emulate. And the vast majority of such volunteers were exemplary in their conduct and deportment. And only that miniscule minority are left to mar the image and reputation of one of the best organizations ever founded for developing our young people.

Unless you walk the walk you are not to be believed.

How sad that idealistic young women and men went across Canada to over 100 residential schools to devote themselves to offering an education and an example to 150,000 indigenous children, only to find themselves enmeshed in an educational system that demeaned and debased, and amongst a very few predators who hunted and haunted defenceless children. Truly I tell you, they have earned their reward. The legacy of the residential schools will be with us for generations but we have taken the first baby steps on the journey that one day may see us walking together.

Jesus often moves away from the particular group (here the scribes and Pharisees) to focus on the general – and he uses the word “Hypocrites” and when using this word the canvass can include all of us at one time or another. We all play at religion... or morals, or ethics or beliefs at some point or other, knowing that our talk and our walk often conflict... just walk down Spring Garden and begin to see who you see and who is invisible and who you simply ignore. Allen Hilton says, “The antidote for hypocrisy is grace” He goes on to say “this Jesus keeps loving and loving, despite failings and blemishes”. And that loving is inclusive of those same scribes and Pharisees and ministers like me and elders like you and lay folk everywhere.

The theme for the last few days at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings has been: “It's about love – a National Journey for Healing, Families and Reconciliation.

The bottom line when all the words are spoken and all the hype is over is this: “It's time to practice what we preach.

And what we preach is this, the closing words of the introduction of “One in the Spirit – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Peoples walking together in Ministry and toward reconciliation:

In 2006, the 132nd General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada mandated a program called, *Walking Together*. Emphasizing the pursuit of local relationship building, the program envisions that by getting to know each other better, over time we will peel away the divisive myths, stereotypes, and misunderstandings and resolve the many

outstanding issues in our relationship. Presbyterians across Canada have responded in creative ways to bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples together and this publication includes stories of how this work is unfolding.

This is a sacred moment in our history. The Presbyterian Church in Canada is not alone in the pursuit of healing and reconciliation. Together with the major Aboriginal organizations in Canada, representatives of the over 90,000 survivors of residential schools, the other denominations which ran residential schools (the United Church of Canada, the Anglican Church of Canada, and 54 separate Roman Catholic entities), along with the Government of Canada, have mandated a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC began work in 2009 and over its five-year mandate will document the living history of residential schools for future generations; sponsor national and community-designed events that bring peoples together to model healing and reconciliation; and make recommendations to all parties about how Canadians may build on the momentum of this sacred time of truth-telling, healing and reconciliation to bring about a future where Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace prevails.

Micah spared no words of comfort for those who would not offer the spiritual guidance they were called by God to offer; Jesus blasted those who would place burdens on those already burdened by the circumstances of life. Jesus called us to be ambassadors of Reconciliation, offering the healing presence and the love of God to all in need, following the teaching and the example of the one who came to serve, even Jesus Christ.

Please, allow me one more word. I wrote the Study for our denomination when we confessed before God the sin of what we had done to aboriginal peoples. In the final section of that study I quoted at length a dear friend in faith, Stewart Folster who was speaking before the royal commission. As I quote from his words of nearly 20 years ago, listen for the words of Thessalonians.

Give us something to take home to our people, give us hope and peace and love but show us you care. Show us we can work together to bring healing and harmony back to creation. Don't give us more empty words, and stop putting the Indian people through this over and over again ... let's not let this go for nothing. I wonder if you really care. If you do so, then so me!"

Paul said: "so deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.