

“Micah and Money”

Micah 6:6-8

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Our culture is fascinated with money. It would be hard to walk into a bookstore or turn on the radio or television and deny this. Bookshelves and the airways are filled with financial gurus giving advice about how to earn and manage money. Suze Orman, Dave Ramsey, Clark Howard and Jim Cramer are some of today’s most popular authors and talk show hosts.

This morning, I would like to add Micah’s voice to the mix. **How does Micah’s challenge speak to the way we should earn and spend our money?**

Who was Micah? He was an eighth century Old Testament prophet that delivered powerful messages to the religious leaders in Jerusalem. He boldly spoke truth to power and encouraged them to turn away from the culture’s values that had made them greedy, power hungry and complacent. These values had created a world characterized by injustice, hostility, violence and arrogance and God was expecting them to change that.

What did he challenge them to do? He challenged them to “do justly, love kindness and walk humbly with their God” Micah 6:8. I’m sure you recognize his challenge to these leaders because we have adopted it as our theme this year. All our publications, including each Sunday’s bulletin, have this challenge printed on them.

How does Micah’s challenge speak to the way I should earn and spend my money? This is a question we need to consider on Consecration Sunday, the culmination of our annual stewardship campaign. Let me begin the discussion this morning.

To do justly means that I will earn and spend my money in honorable ways. If I own a business, I will be honest and fair in my dealings with others, including customers and employees. If I work for someone else, I’ll work hard, be dependable, loyal and trustworthy.

To do justly means that I will live within my means and pay people what I owe them. I will draft a budget and stick to it. I will curb my appetite for things so that spending does not spiral out of control.

To do justly means that I will purchase goods and services from those that are good to their employees. I will patronize those that pay decent wages and provide safe working conditions for their employees.

Whenever possible, I will purchase Fair Trade Certified products because this is one way I can put my faith in practice. Every person deserves a life of dignity with adequate food, education and good health. Fair Trade helps make this possible for farmers, farm workers and their families in many parts of the world through a dynamic system of direct trade relationships, access to global markets and fair prices for their products. Fair Trade is a model that works because it strengthens families and communities, empowers people to take care of themselves, promotes human rights and supports responsible stewardship of the earth.

On the table in the breezeway you can get more information about Fair Trade, including a list of products you can purchase. Pick one up on your way out today and put your faith into practice this week.

To love kindness means that I am not going to spend all my money on me or my family. In addition to taking care of my family, I am going to be sensitive to the needs of those that are struggling and share generously with them.

Prophets like Micah never missed an opportunity to remind Israel’s leaders of the importance of compassion. They believed, as Rabbi Harold Kushner has reminded us that the purpose of religion was to create community, making sure that everyone had a seat at the table where their voice was heard and their needs met. This was the noblest goal of Judaism.

This is the loftiest goal of every faith tradition I have studied and this was affirmed again last week in our own city. Did you read the article by the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibet, in last Wednesday's edition of the *AJC*? It was titled, "Embrace World with Compassion." He highlighted the importance of relationships and community when he wrote, "A deep sense of caring for others, based upon a profound sense of interconnection, is the essence of the teachings of all great religions of the world. In my travels, I always consider my foremost mission to be the promotion of basic human qualities of goodness—the need for and appreciation of the value of love, our natural capacity for compassion and the need for genuine fellow feeling."

Our Christian tradition certainly accentuates the value of compassion. One of the boldest statements Jesus ever made came soon after he fed the five thousand. In John 6:35, Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

How could he make such an outlandish claim? How could he be so confident? He believed no one would go hungry because his followers would never allow it to happen! They would be too kindhearted, compassionate and unselfish to let one person go without the necessities of life. They would hear the cries of the poor and not turn a deaf ear. They would share their resources, not hoard them. They would simplify their lifestyles rather than ignoring the plight of the hungry. They would become advocates for the oppressed, creating a world built upon economic and social justice.

Was he right? Are you helping to keep his dream alive and fulfill his vision? Do your spending habits reflect your unselfish and compassionate spirit? Perhaps you need to ask God what He thinks. This is what the third part of Micah's challenge encourages us to do.

To walk humbly with God means that I am going to talk to Him about how I earn and spend my money. What comes naturally when two people walk together? They talk. Micah encouraged his readers, and now us, to have a conversation with God about money.

Why should I do this? I should do it because stewardship is not a financial matter, it is a spiritual matter. I am a steward entrusted by God to take care of His world, so it is only natural that I seek divine wisdom to determine how to use the resources He has entrusted to my care to take care of His world. I need to leave the world better than I found it, which means I must have guidance to make wise decisions and strength to overcome the temptation to do otherwise.

Who is your role model for good stewardship? Who do you know that takes Micah's challenge seriously? What have you learned from them? What is different about them than those that ignore Micah's challenge?

Who is looking to you to set an example for them? Who needs you to add Micah's voice to the voices of our consumer driven culture? What changes do you need to make to be able to be that faithful role model? Why not talk to God about this right now.