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1/29/23—University Presbyterian Church
Micah 6:1-8

GET POLITICAL!

You shouldn't mix religion and politics. At least, that is the wisdom *some* people follow. And yet, the prophet Micah gets *very* political. But how can he not? How can Micah *not* get political when political corruption and greed and abuse surround him? The prophet Micah speaks to the social and economic injustice within his society. Wealthy landowners greedily snatched up the properties of small farmers. Vulnerable women and children were evicted from their homes without any place to go. Political leaders are depicted by Micah as cannibals who devoured the powerless and pursued building projects that exploited the workers in ways that cost many laborers their very lives. And the court system, the only means the poor and powerless had for seeking justice, the court system was no better, as it was infected with bribery. Micah confronts a society that is rife with political malfeasance and he tells them this all displeases God.

Micah gets political because *God* gets political. God cares about the welfare of all God's children. So, if some of God's children, especially those without power or recourse, are being abused, God gets involved. *That's* the story of the Bible, told over and over again, the story of God getting involved in unjust circumstances.

That is what Micah reminds his people about in our scripture today. Micah imagines God standing before the community in a courtroom. This is part of Micah's imagination. Only, unlike the corrupt courtrooms of Micah's society, this courtroom is governed fairly and justly. And God brings charges against the rulers and leaders and wealthy people of the community.

And God reminds them of all the ways God has acted to save the people from their distressing *political* situations.

For example, God reminds the people of when they were slaves in Egypt, held captive by the Egyptian government, and how through the leadership of Moses, and Aaron, and Miriam, God rescued the people from their bondage. Talk about political! Think about exactly what a massive political act it was to take away the enslaved human labor force upon which an entire society's economy was dependent.

God is always political because God loves us. And to love us means to care about the realities of human beings lives. And political forces, good and bad, are definitely part of our reality.

When I speak about politics I don't mean *partisan*. I don't mean whether a person is a Democrat or a Republican, a socialist or a communist or a capitalist—although all of those ideologies obviously relate to politics. Politics are about how human beings organize themselves in communities and how they relate to one another on a communal level. Politics are about whether low income children are offered free lunches at school. Politics are about whether a real estate agent can refuse to sell a home to someone because of their race or religion. Politics are about whether industries can dump toxic waste into waterways that your home depends upon for drinking water. Politics are about the decisions and practices and policies of people in community.

Micah gets political because of the political practices and policies he witnesses in his community. And he is outraged because he knows that such behaviors are not reflecting God's ways and God's will. And so Micah lays out three very political practices that God's people need to adopt in order to be faithful to God, in order to reflect God's will.

Number one: do justice. Notice, this is a call to do justice for *other* people. This is a call to *social* justice. And that means it is a summons to get political. What Micah teaches us is that the social welfare of others is a religious matter. The problem of police brutality, especially against people of color, is a political problem that becomes a spiritual and religious matter. Image what the prophet Micah would have to say about what took place against Tyre Nichols, what continues to take place against people of color too often in this nation by law enforcement, what society has excused and permitted to occur over and over again. Can you imagine God permitting people of faith like us to ignore such a gross injustice? Get political, God tells us, because people's lives are at stake.

Number two: love steadfast loyalty. The translation that we "love kindness," is rather a weak translation for the Hebrew word. The Hebrew word *hesed* conveys a strong element of loyalty. This word *hesed* is often used in the Bible when speaking about God's love for us. God is steadfastly loyal to us and calls us to be steadfastly loyal not only to God but to one another. To act with steadfast loyalty to one another is a political act because no longer can we just be concerned with our own welfare. We are called by God to care about the welfare of one another.

Number three: walk humbly with God. Humility before God means we know our place. Humility before God means we don't confuse ourselves for God, thinking we are self-sufficient, autonomous beings who can use power however we wish. You can't take what belongs to another. You can't pollute the air others will breathe. You can't enslave others for your own economic gain. You can't ignore unsafe working conditions. To walk humbly with God is to live in awareness of our proper relationship and posture before the Creator. And this awareness shapes our political and social relationships. We cannot treat others any way we want if we are living in right relationship with our God.

Micah gets political and tells us that God requires that we get political too. God *requires* us to get political.

You know who else got political? Jesus. Jesus never ran for government office. Jesus never sought to overthrow the political powers ruling his people. But Jesus was nevertheless *very* political. And that is because he loved. The most political thing you could ever do is to love. Love is always a political act. Love is always a political act. Who you love, how you love, is always a political act.

Look at the Beatitudes we read in today's reading from Matthew's gospel. Jesus makes extraordinary statements about who God loves. Everyone in his society believed that wealth and power and health and status were signs of God's favor. And on some level, we operate similarly today. People who are successful are considered good and worthy of listening to. Heck, our society will even *elect* someone to a major political office even if they are completely unqualified—but they are wealthy. And so they are afforded credibility. While those who are low income, those who are disadvantaged, are often overlooked. How often do we hear stories of a child of color being channeled by the educational system away from college bound courses because no one expects them to be able to succeed?

But Jesus comes along and teaches that God's favor is upon the weak and the poor, the lowly and the powerless. Blessed are the meek, blessed are the persecuted, blessed are the merciful, blessed are those who mourn, and so on. And with these words, Jesus makes a very politically charged claim. It upsets everyone's understanding of how society is structured and organized—and how God acts in this world.

And then Jesus goes about living out that love. He eats with all the wrong people, forgives all the wrong people, touches and heals all the wrong people. And he gave the lowly

and the poor dangerous ideas about their worth and value. And the people in power, the religious leaders and the Roman rulers, got nervous. Jesus was upsetting the social norms and the religious norms. And let us remember where Jesus' love gets him. Let us remember that Jesus' love ends up getting him executed as a *political* prisoner. Those who hated Jesus, hated Jesus' politics—his politics about love.

Love is always political. Who you love, how you love is always political.

Faith and politics belong together. As people of faith, we are required by God to “get political.” Let God's love inspire you to care for your neighbor. Let God's love motivate you to forgive someone. Let God's love empower you to write a letter or march in a protest on behalf of the powerless. Let God's love strengthen your resolve to live more simply so others may simply live. Let God's love encourage you to acts of compassion. Let God's love move you to adopt practices that care for the earth. Let God's love inform the way you vote. And may we never underestimate the political power of love.