

“FOOD AND WINE”
Micah 6:6-8; Proverbs 31:8-9
A Sermon by Rev. Garrett Walkup
Woodbury UMC
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I want to talk about food and wine today.

1st here is a quote from a snooty wine guy...

“The irony about the best soils for growing grapes is this: the rockiest soils, the least fertile soils, the soils that cannot support so many other crops are often the best soils for wine. Rocky soils rich in limestone, as in the Burgundy region, or soils filled with fine gravel from the Bordeaux region are near ideal for growing grapes. These soils drain easily and don’t hold water at the roots of the vine, and so the grapes don’t bloat with water, diluting flavors instead they produce concentrated sweet fruit”

The terrain beneath our feet has been rocky and tough to trek across. We have been moving slowly, not knowing what is next, constantly looking down taking small steps putting 1 foot in front of the other.

But something began to happen, you started to figure it out how to do and be the church. That rocky ground that suddenly was beneath our feet began to produce sweet and beautiful fruit that had the aroma of Christ.

It was this church family doing what you do best, it was a picture of the body of Christ ministering to others in a way we have simply never seen before.

Thank you for producing sweet fruit while standing on rocky soil.

Now I want to give you a similar cooking lesson.

I have learned that there is great value in reducing things down. Low and slow and rendering out water also produces a sweet result, onions, mushrooms, balsamic vinegar-becomes a syrup you can pour on anything.

The Old Testament prophets bluntly and boldly often boil it down for us.

Micah 6:8-in one single verse tells us what this whole thing is about.

We don’t know a lot about him but we do know this: he witnessed the emergence of a separating wealthy class, corruption, idolatry. *Good thing we don’t live in those times anymore.*

But he also saw many making great personal sacrifices for what they thought was to satisfy divine justice, which he sets it up in the 2 verses before that.

Micah 6:6-7 With what shall I come before the Lord?

- Burnt offerings of calves a year old
- Thousands of rams
- Ten-thousand rivers of oil
- My firstborn

Micah goes from a standard practice sacrifice to the absurd.

Here is the “reduce it down” verse 6:8. Perhaps one of the most well-known verses from the prophets.

“He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

He captures in a single verse what we should be doing on the outside and what our attitude should be on the inside.

Act Justly

Micah 4:6 “In that coming day,” says the LORD, “I will gather together those who are lame, those who have been exiles, and those whom I have filled with grief.”

Justice is care for the vulnerable, the sad, the weak. Its protecting the innocent, and the poor.

Proverbs 31: 8-9 “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Thousands in your immediate circle, in close proximity, for one reason or another, have limited access or do not have access at all to basic human rights. They can't speak for themselves, they can't defend themselves, they can't even feed themselves.

We have an obligation to, as Jesus tells us, to do for the least of these brothers and sisters of His, as we would do for Him.

Love Mercy

You know those yellow signs on the back of semi-trucks? They say “caution, this vehicle makes wide right turns.”

There are a lot of people in your life that need to be treated the same way, that need mercy.

My wife told that whenever she comes across someone that is difficult, demanding, or intense, she tries to think about something she has in common with them. Instead of constructing a wall of differences to say “I am not like that person” She says to herself “just like me...” She tries to identify what walking in their shoes must feel like.

If you hear nothing else today hear this...

Offering compassionate, humanitarian, forgiving behavior towards others is the cornerstone of the outward expression of our faith.

If we even extended a fraction of the grace to others that we have received by Jesus, what would this world look like?

Psalm 136 has 26 verses, and the word mercy so important it is said in 26 times.

And mercy is something that goes hand in hand with acting justly. Not only do we need to care of the wounds of those in need. We are to do it gently and tenderly.

Psalm 89:14 “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; but steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.”

Jesus says it this way, in quoting another minor prophet Hosea “I desire mercy, not sacrifice”

Words many years ago that brought me to my knees in my dorm room. Jesus wanted me in my brokenness not in my outward expressions of religion. I'm sure glad he loved mercy because that meant he loved me.

Watching you all over the past months care for each other, your mercy has been overwhelming. Thank you not just demonstrating mercy but loving it.

Finally, we are to **Walk Humbly** with our God.

When we walk humbly we say, as John the Baptist said, (that) “He must become greater and we must become less.”

Again Micah bluntly says in 2:3 “you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be a time of disaster.”

Think about it this way when my kids were younger I did not want them walking haughtily through a busy parking lot. I wanted them to stop, stand next to me, and reach up for my hand.

When we walk humbly with him, we are acknowledging that we want covenant relationship with him, that He will be our god and we will be His people.

Submit yourself to him, lay yourself open before him. Be honest and vulnerable.

He is waiting for your reach up to hold his hand! And when you do he joyfully reaches down to hold yours.

The simple expression of a hand out, and palm up is a humbling act, it is saying please fill what is not here.

Not to brag but one of the things I am amazing at is being humble. (See how ridiculous that sounds?!)

Theologian Charles Spurgeon “I would not advise any of you to try to be humble, but to be humble. As to acting humbly, when a man forces himself to it, that is poor stuff. When a man talks a great deal about his humility, when he is very humble to everybody, he is generally a canting hypocrite. Humility must be in the heart, and then it will come out spontaneously as the outflow of life in every act that a man performs.”

I know for most of us when we were faced with great sorrow, anguish, fatigue and even fear we found ourselves asking God what happened, and the even bigger question, why?

We want answers to questions when there simply are no answers. We want simplicity in something that is of great complexity, far beyond our understanding.

My simple, boiled down answer is this...Life is a gift from God, one we are to treasure within ourselves, spend lavishly loving Him, and spend lavishly loving others.

Life in relationship and in community is not clean or simple. It's not black and white. Life in relationship and community is messy, time consuming, complicated, frustrating and, if done honestly won't ever be any other way.

True sacrificial loving relationships will take everything you have, they will drive you to your knees. They will make you cry out the way Jesus did in the garden when he said “take this cup from me.”

So what do we do when ground beneath our feet becomes rocky? How do we continue on? Maybe we don't, maybe we stop, maybe we let others work on producing a sweet wine that we just can't.

Then as time begins to pass maybe we begin again. And you know where you start?

By acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly.

Amen

Benediction 2 Cor. 13:11 - Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.