**Blessings in Abundance**

Micah 6:1-8
Matthew 5:1-12

How could you forget? According to the prophet Micah, that is the question God poses to the people of Israel. How could you forget? For those of us over 50, that’s a sensitive question. Every time we fail to remember a name, misplace our keys or any of a number of ways in which we forget, we grow anxious about our memory. The rest of you young people have a few years yet before you have that particular worry. But, for those of us 50 and up, remembering is an anxiety never far from the surface. We, of course, joke about it. In our kitchen is a plaque given to us by a couple friends who are similar in age to Michele and me. It says, “As you get older, your secrets are safe with your friends, because they can’t remember them either.”

 How could you forget? That’s the question God poses to the people of Israel. God then goes on to point out all the things the people of God have forgotten. There is, of course, the big one, “the freedom from slavery that God made possible.” But, there are smaller things God expects them to remember as well. Something about King Balaak of Moab, Balaam son of Mor, and something that happened between Shittim and Gilgal.

According to Micah, God is placing them on trial with creation sitting in the jury seat. “Plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice.” It all seems a bit harsh, don’t you think? When you get to be a certain age, it’s hard to remember all those details about what happened when. But you younger folks aren’t totally off the hook, because God seems to be expecting you to remember things that happened before you were even on the scene. It sort of like expecting our new members to know what the fellowship hall looked like 30 years ago. Would it be fair to hold you accountable because you know nothing about the fluorescent lights that hung from the ceiling at various odd angles or the chipped rectangular tables? Jim Shatek has been around long enough to remember our old bathrooms. Jim was a member for almost a year before we let him know where the hidden light switch to the Men’s bathroom was. It would be unfair for those of you who have only been attending for a few years to know about the old bathrooms or what the nursery once looked like or host of other things that have taken place.

But, God seems to have an expectation that you know these things? How could you forget Balaak, Balaam, Gilgal, the twisted fluorescent lights or that old musty bathroom? “I have a controversy with you my people,” says God.

Fortunately, however, God’s controversy is not with us as individuals, but with the community as a whole. That is the key.

It is the people as a whole who seem to have forgotten how God has been with them in the past, the way in which God has led them out of slavery, turned the evil intended by Balaak into a blessing by Balaam, brought them from the wilderness post of Shittim to the Promised land at Gilgal. God has been at work in their midst, as a community, as a people and they seem to have forgotten the blessings which they have received.

We may lose track of some of the details like the old fluorescent lights in the Fellowship Hall, the dingy old bathroom, the musty nursery, but the one thing that it is crucial we continue to remember as a community of faith is that God is the source of blessing. “O my people” says God, “remember so that you may know the saving acts of God.” Whether you are young or old, whether you have been around a long time or a very short time, it is our mutual calling to remember the source of the blessings that draw us into relationship with God, with each other, with all creation.

The covenantal promise God makes to Abraham and Sarah is a covenantal promise that is at the very center of every blessing from God. “I will bless you…so that you may be a blessing.” This gets to the heart of the problem and why the people of God are on trial with the mountains and the hills sitting in the jury box. When we forget the blessings that we have received, when we forget how God has been at work in our midst, how God leads, guides and sustains, we forget our central calling as a people of faith, “we are blessed so that we may be a blessing.” In our time, in this day, it can be especially unnerving to be told that creation is sitting in the jury box. Are we as a people a blessing to the rivers and the lakes, the forests and the prairies, the birds and the fish, the moose and the butterfly?

Like prosperity Gospel Christians today who are lured by the capitalistic notion that blessings have something to do with material transactions, the people to whom the prophet Micah speaks want to know how can we repay God for the blessings? What does God need, burnt offerings, a thousand rams, my first born child? The answer is the same answer given to Abraham and Sarah, “you are blessed, so that you may be a blessing”. What does God require of you, “but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Those are the core values for a community of faith, then and now.

The problem is for us as individuals, is that we do forget God is the source of abundant blessings for us, for all people and for creation itself. I know that is true for me and I guess it is true for you. I forget about the blessings of God. We face hard times. We face disappointments. Challenges and frustrations come our way. The daily news constantly reminds us about issues about which we feel absolutely powerless to make a difference, poverty, gun violence, racial inequity in everything from our schools to our prisons, climate.

Many of the individuals who come to hear Jesus preach on the mountain have forgotten about the blessings of God. Most are among the poor. All live under the domination of the Roman Empire, which seems to control everything from the economy to the military.

There is someone in the congregation who is poor in spirit, ready to give up, feeling all alone, no reason for hope, but in a community remembering God’s blessings, she rediscovers that she is a part of the Kingdom of God and according to Jesus she knows she is blessed. There is someone in the congregation who mourns, the tears roll down his face as he silently grieves the losses that are his, but in this congregation remembering God’s blessings, he is surround by love, by care, by support and with tears still flowing, he knows he is blessed. There is a young person who has put up with a lot of bullying at school, some of it has even been posted on Facebook and Twitter, she is tempted to strike back, but in this community remembering God’s blessings, she rediscovers the promise that the God of the meek is with her always, the earth itself will be hers, and she too is blessed.

There is an older man who has spent a life time working for justice, he hungers and thirsts for a day when people will no longer be discriminated against because of the color of their skin, that those who have had the deck stacked against them will be given a fair shot. He sees so little progress, daily he struggles with a profound feeling of hopelessness, blessings are all but forgotten, but in this community remembering God’s blessings, he is suddenly filled once again with hope, with courage, with energy and he knows that he is blessed.

There are so many individuals who because of the challenges and struggles of life have begun to forget the blessings that sustain them. There are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers’, those who are persecuted all who come into this congregation gathered with Jesus feeling blessings they know are few and far between.

But, this congregation, this community of faith, drawn together by the one who proclaims God’s love and God’s justice, remembers, remembers the blessings of God.

You are blessed so that you might be a blessing. When the promise is remembered there are blessings in abundance.

**Micah 6:1-8**

*In our first lesson the prophet Micah speaks the word of God to a people who have forgotten how God has been with them in the past and has been the source of their salvation. The prophet imagines a trial in which creation becomes the jury. The people look for leniency, trying to bargain, but they are reminded there is only one thing that God requires of them as a people, “to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.”*

Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

**Matthew 5:1-12**

*Our Gospel lesson today is part of what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. A congregation of people have gathered with Jesus. M any if not all feel discouraged. They are among the poor and, of little consequence to the powerful of Rome. This is the story of what Jesus says about what it means to be blessed by God.*

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:
"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."