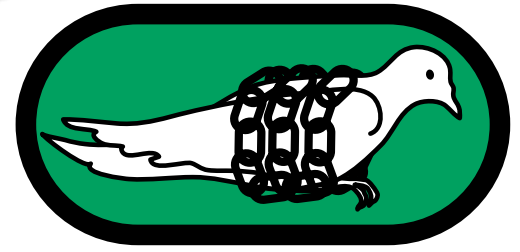




Mennonite
Church
USA



NO JUSTICE NO PEACE

November 2, 2008



Peace Sunday

Micah 3: 5–12

*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,
to Israel his sin.*

— Micah 3:8

The eighth-century (B.C.E.) rural prophet Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah. Micah was a country prophet who spoke for poor farmers suffering under the hands of powerful landlords. In his prophetic speeches he spoke to leaders in power—the leaders of Jerusalem, the wealthy, rulers, landowners, judges, priests and prophets—about their perpetration of and complicity in injustice.

Chapter three of Micah is a bold and blunt indictment of leaders of Jerusalem who abuse their power. These leaders do not know justice and “hate the good and love the evil.” Their exploitation of the common people makes them like voracious cannibals who “tear the skin off my people” and “eat the flesh.” The lives of the peasants who live off the land are being devoured by injustice.

Micah castigates the prophets who disconnect peace and justice and serve their own needs. They cry “peace,” but declare war on the poor by supporting and legitimizing the injustices of the land, which rob them of their food and well-being. Their power is self-serving.

The prophet Micah contrasts his lifestyle with the leaders of Jerusalem. Micah is filled with a different kind of power from the power that exploits, abuses, subjugates, oppresses and dehumanizes. He is filled with “the Spirit of the Lord and with justice and might.” This spirit comes from God, who will inspire Micah to envision a day when nations will “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks,” instruments of destruction transformed into productive and peaceful instruments for the common good (Micah 4:3).

Sermon seeds

Preaching from the prophets will necessarily call for prophetic preaching. Prophetic preaching is not always controversial or the opposite of pastoral and evangelical preaching. It is not about moralizing or even about castigation and judgment. Prophetic preaching is more about speaking the truth of God for the particular time and context in which we live. Or, as Philip Wogaman put it, prophetic preaching means “bringing the light of the gospel upon all aspects of human existence.”

A number of sermon themes can be drawn from the lectionary reading from the third chapter of Micah.

■ **No justice, no peace**—Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “Without justice, there is no peace.” Justice and peace are integrally linked. The false prophets of Micah’s day proclaimed a peace divorced from justice. They gave religious legitimacy to the leaders in power and their unjust social practices while announcing a message of peace. A sermon directly linking justice and peace, grounded in the vision of God’s reign, can speak to our contemporary context where religious leaders legitimize inequities of power and privilege, social injustice, and the neglect of the poor with messages of “peace,” like “everything is OK with us” or “we are immune from violence.”

■ **The spirit of justice**—Micah declared that he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord and with justice. As with justice and peace, spirituality and justice have too often been separated. They were separated by the false prophets in Israel. Today, in Western societies, individualism and privatism pervade our spirituality. Spirituality has become an individual and private matter of Bible reading, prayer and contemplation, disconnected from public, social, economic and political realities. A sermon that ties together justice and spirituality can help to reconnect these disconnected spheres of human life.

■ **Lead us into peace**—Both elite and powerful community and religious leaders were brought under the scrutiny of Micah’s prophetic lens. They collaborated and used their power and position in ways that only reinforced unjust social conditions. Today, the situation within U.S. politics and religion is similar. Religious and political leaders work in tandem to legitimize and perpetuate sexism, racism, poverty, injustice and inequity. This does violence to those on the barrel end of injustice, creates social unrest, and, at times, responsive, revolutionary violence, while these leaders speak of and call for peace.

This sermon could explore a new kind of leadership that creates policies and practices of justice and peace for all.

Action ideas

Worship should never be separated from action. The prophets called for worship and work, piety and practice to be united (Amos 65:22-24; Isaiah 58:6-7). Thus, the Peace and Justice Support Network’s slogan: “Pray for Peace, Act for Peace.” These are some suggested actions to make worship and work one.

1 In preparation for Peace Sunday and the elections, hold an adult Christian education class on the relationship between faith and politics. Avoid getting into partisan politics. Discuss the pros and cons of voting, the morality of government spending and foreign policy, and the relationship between church and state. Write letters to your senators and congressional representatives on a key issue that the class can agree to support. Lead or participate in a voter registration drive. Resources can be found at peace.mennolink.org/articles/faithpol.html.

2 Hold an ecumenical and/or interfaith prayer gathering in a public place in your city before the elections. Work with the local interchurch/interfaith organization. Seek to include racial/ethnic leaders and participants in the planning and practice. Pray for political officials, the government, the United States, and for all nations and peoples. Pray for the witness of the church, synagogue, mosque and temple within the community and world.

3 Engage your congregation in following up on the Atlanta 2003 Mennonite Church USA churchwide statement on immigration. Material on immigration can be found at peace.mennolink.org/immigration.html. Particularly refer to the MC USA material entitled “Strangers No More.” Also encourage the use of “Just Coffee,” a fair-trade plus coffee, in your congregation (peace.mennolink.org/articles/justcoffee.html).



Sample worship service

Gathering

Gathering hymns

"I will stand in the congregation,"

Sing the Journey, No. 113

"O Prince of peace,"

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 15

Call to worship

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord
to the house of the God of Jacob, Leah and Rachel;

That God may teach us God's way
and that we may walk in God's paths.

Praising

Hymns of praise

"My soul is filled with joy,"

Sing the Journey, No. 13

"God of many names,"

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 77

Confessing

Call to confession

Hear, you peoples, all of you; listen, O earth, and all that is in it; and let the Lord be a witness against you, the Lord from the holy temple. — Micah 1:1

Come, let us confess our sins to God, so that we may be pardoned and healed.

Corporate confession

Too long, O God, we have separated justice from peace and spirituality from justice. We have cried "peace" against wars across the world, while neglecting to address racism, sexism, xenophobia, injustice and poverty in our own front yards. We have made peace and justice political acts devoid of the Spirit and grounding in faith and prayer. Bring together what we have divided. Restore in us a new spirit of peace with justice, of equity with faith. Amen.

Silent confession

Assurance of forgiveness

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? God does not retain anger forever, because God delights in showing clemency. God will again have compassion upon us. God will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. — Micah 7:18-19

Response hymns

"What does the Lord require of you?"

Sing the Story, No. 54

"Let justice roll like a river,"

Sing the Story, No. 33

Hearing

Sermon (See "Sermon seeds.")

Response hymns

"How can we be silent,"

Sing the Journey, No. 61

"Put peace into each other's hands,"

Sing the Journey, No. 87

Sending

He shall judge between many peoples,
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore;
but they shall sit under their own vines and fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid.
— Micah 4:3-4

Benediction hymns

"Make me a channel of your peace,"

Sing the Journey, No. 56

"The peace of the earth be with you,"

Sing the Journey, No. 77

Worship and the arts ideas

1 Create a banner using the design of the Peace Sunday logo. An opaque projector can be used to project the design onto a cloth or canvas for sewing or painting.

2 Enlist a creative writer in the congregation to write a monologue that would express the prophet Micah's concerns about injustice. Have it read as a dramatic reading. Or if there is someone who likes acting, have them dress as a prophet and present the monologue in the worship service.

3 Download the "Artisans of Social Change" poster series (peace.mennolink.org) into a computer file or put them in a PowerPoint format. Using an LCD projector, display them in a slide show during the worship service. Have several readers read the quotes. Have the church pianist softly play a song of peace and justice or play a recording of a song in the background while the slide show is being presented. Possible songs include "We are people of God's peace," *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, No. 407, or Sy Miller and Jill Jackson Miller's "Let there be peace on earth" (www.sheetmusicplus.com).

Ideas for children

1 During the month of November, use the resource Rebecca Seiling's *Plant a Seed of Peace* (Herald Press, 2007) for children's story time in worship. The book contains 43 stories of peacemakers from the past and today. Offer the book as a gift to parents who become members of the congregation.

2 On several Sundays leading up to Peace Sunday, have the children work with adults on constructing a giant peace dove puppet. Instructions for making the peace dove can be found at www.rootsandshoots.org/campaigns/dove. The

children can process into the church with the dove during a final hymn of peace and/or lead a recessional from the worship space outside where the church prays for peace and justice in the community.

3 Encourage a Sunday school class to use Mennonite Mission Network's mission banks project. Do the study material in "Colombia: Working together for peace" provided at www.mennonitemission.net/MissionBank. Banks are \$4.95 plus shipping and handling, and can be ordered online.

4 Use as a bulletin insert for children the "We are people of God's peace" coloring sheet available at peace.mennolink.org/resources.

Reading resources

Arthur Paul Boers, *On Earth as it is in Heaven: Justice Rooted in Spirituality*. Wipf and Stock, 2008.

Walter J. Burghardt, *Preaching the Just Word*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

Pedro Casaldaliga and Jose-Maria Vigil, *Political Holiness. A Spirituality of Liberation*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994.

James M. Childs, Jr., *Preaching Justice: The Ethical Vocation of Word and Sacrament Ministry*. Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000.

Carol J. Dempsey, *The Prophets: A Liberation-Critical Reading*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.

Donal Dorr, *Spirituality and Justice*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984.

Mary Alice Mulligan and Rufus Burrow, Jr., *Daring to Speak in God's Name: Ethical Prophecy in Ministry*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2002.

Rebecca Seiling, *Plant a Seed of Peace*. Herald Press, 2007.

J. Philip Wogaman, *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching in a Broken World*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998.



For peace and justice resources or to join the network, go to www.mennoniteusa.org/peace. For more information about PJSN or to offer your responses to the Peace Sunday material, contact Leo Hartshorn, Mennonite Mission Network, 202 S. Ann St., Lancaster, PA 17602; 717-399-8353; LeoH@MennoniteMission.net. **Your financial gifts are crucial for continuing to strengthen the vision of peace and justice in Mennonite Church USA. Thank you for your support.**