**After the #Hashtag**

**Micah 6: 1-8**

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According to sociologists, Black Lives Matter may be the largest movement in US history. (NY Times, July 3, 2020) On June 6th alone of this year, half a million people turned out in nearly 550 places across the United States to support this movement. That was just a single day in more than a month of protests that still continue today.

About 15 to 26 million people in the United States have participated in demonstrations over the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and countless others.

One of the reasons there have been protests in so many places in the United States is the backing of organizations like Black Lives Matter. While the group isn’t necessarily directing each protest, it provides materials, guidance and a framework for new activists.

Those activists are using social media to quickly share protest details and other important information to a wide audience.

Social media and the hashtag. Perhaps you’ve heard of it? Starting in 2007 the folks at Twitter (a type of social media) came up with a simple way to connect social media content to a specific topic, event, theme or conversation. The hashtag is simply the pound symbol on your keyboard.

The hashtag has been described as, “Always in-style and never late to the party, it’s the prelude to every important online conversation.”

You can post a hashtag or like a hashtag or share a hashtag about any topic under the sun. #TBT – Throw Back Thursday – you post pictures from years past on Thursdays, Lays potato chips #DoUsAFlavor, #ShareACoke campaign by Coca Cola.

In 2014 the ice bucket challenge soaked the world to raise awareness and research funding for ALS. Six years out and elementary aged kids are still doing the challenge…it just happened in my back yard last week.

#March For Our Lives #Women’s March #Me Too

Who knew that this symbol, so small and unassuming, would help change the world? //

*For everyone born, a place at the table, for everyone born, clean water and bread,*

*a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing, for everyone born, a star overhead.*

*For everyone born, a place at the table, to live without fear, and simply to be,*

*to work, to speak out, to witness and worship, for everyone born, the right to be*

*free.* (#769)

These are two verses from the hymn “For Everyone Born” in our Glory to God hymnal. The words as described in the hymnbook “…affirm that God’s hospitality transcends the barriers erected by human society and that we who have been created in God’s image are called to live in ways that reflect our Creator’s values: justice and joy, compassion and peace.”

I think this aptly describes what is behind the social movements that define our society today.

But, what happens after the #? After we posted or liked or shared the #movement? What is our role as individual Christians and as a community of faith during this time of significant social and political change and within the context of a global pandemic?

How does the church speak out and participate in these movements, in these calls for tearing down discriminatory walls and barriers and structures without merely absorbing it as historical information? How do we avoid returning to business as usual? How do we, the church, actually do its part to change the future to look more like God’s kin-dom?

As we heard for our reading today, one of the most well-known verses in the Old Testament written by the prophet Micah gives us some guidance:

“What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (NRSV).

Micah was one of the key prophets of the southern kingdom of Judah. The historical setting of this text is not entirely clear but, most likely during the reign of King Hezekiah in the late eighth century BCE.

Micah’s role and the role of all the prophets was not necessarily prophesy, to simply look into the future, their role was “holy imagination” (The Prophetic Imagination, Walter Brueggemann). To imagine what God’s world, what God’s creation, what was it really supposed to be like.

The prophets also remind us of our relationship and covenant with God and our responsibility in that relationship.

Their language was poetry, the prophets were poets. Biblical scholar and author Eugene Peterson describes it this way, “Poets tell us what our eyes, blurred with too much gawking, and our ears, dulled with too much chatter, miss around and within us. Poets use words to drag us into the depth of reality itself. Poetry grabs us by the jugular. Far from being cosmetic language, it is intestinal.”

There are a number of prophets in the Bible. They have very different characteristics, voices, and themes. They were speaking to different times in the history of the Israelites, so there’s not one prophet or one prophetic voice.

But, the words of the prophets characteristically revolve around judgment and hope.

Micah speaks in a context with no shortage of religious people. And, Micah also describes religious leaders who are making a public show of how religious they are with loud lip service to God (Micah 3).

It appears that business-as-usual religion has kept religious leaders self-satisfied and the powerful in power. For a messenger of God to enter this scene and proclaim judgment against the faithful must have been quite a shock.

In the opening verses of Micah’s writings we are told that "the Lord has a controversy with God’s people."

We hear God's sorrowful plea, "O my people," as God tries to understand what has gone wrong. God reviews the divine-human relationship so far. There is a comparison, even implied judgment of the people contrasted to God's faithfulness.

Then the people reply with the question "with what shall I come before the Lord?" There is, surprisingly, no attempt to counter God's claims or to offer a defense against God's accusations.

Rather, the people quickly revert to the go-to response to appease God - What payment will it take to get God off our backs? Burnt offerings? Thousands of rams? My firstborn? How can we even the scoreboard?

But Micah isn't buying it. We can't just write a check.

Micah replies, "God has told you, O mortal, what is good." Micah stands in a line of prophets who have reminded the people over and over again of the path God requires, "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

These are not single acts that can be checked off the list and left behind. On an individual and social scale, in large and small acts, this is a way of life. Periodic nods to equity do not constitute a faithful life, Micah tells us.

So the question remains - Does the relationship you have with God entail any expectations? This text says: Yes.

Because:

We cannot only observe racial membership quotas on committees in place of seeking racial justice.

We cannot send checks for disaster relief and avoid examining the lifestyles that contribute, at least in part, to natural disasters.

We cannot do hunger walks and refuse to change our consumerist lifestyles.

We cannot confess with our lips on Sunday morning and hold grudges at work on Monday.

We cannot turn and look the other way and dodge asking why these situations exist in the first place.

I think it’s important to point out that Micah doesn’t tell people to stop being religious. The problem is not religion in itself. The problem is using ritual practice or worship to excuse ourselves from the divine demands of justice and mercy.

On the other hand, excusing ourselves from communal practices of prayer and worship for the sake of social justice work is equally lacking in maintaining our relationship with God.

But, what continues to be amazing for us 21st century Christians is the relatability and reliability of the words of Micah! The issues are so similar. The world we have known (for good or bad) is changing before our eyes, and the world that is coming at us in unknown and unprecedented - a common term used these days. We can’t quite see the shape of it which is why this kind of poetry always leaves us uneasy.

But that unease, that uncertainty is a holy thing or can be a holy thing — that, in fact, the Bible calls the faithful not to be too settled and too comfortable. This is where we as individuals and as the church can stand and take action.

This is where we are called to be, in the middle of the movement, in the middle of the shaping and reforming, to be a force for God’s vision/the positive and supportive presence among the unease and uncertainty. //

Prof. Douglas McAdam from Stanford University studies social movements and recently made this observation of the Black Lives Matter movement, “It looks, for all the world, like these protests are achieving what very few do:

setting in motion a period of significant, sustained, and widespread social, political change. We appear to be experiencing a social change tipping point — that is as rare in society as it is potentially consequential.”

So, what is the role of the church right now, today, what is your role as a Christian? Your starting place may be different than mine or the person next to you or your faith community.

First (but certainly not the only step), your role is to dream, to do some holy imagining. Don’t worry about the details or logistics. We need to use our collective holy imagination as a church, as the people of God, as those walking humbly with God - what can you imagine happening beyond the hashtag?

How can you be an ally, an advocate, a co-conspirator? Educate yourself about the issues, the conditions, the history.

How can we heed these calls for tearing down discriminatory walls and barriers and structures without merely absorbing it as historical information?

How do we avoid returning to business as usual? How do we, the church, actually do its part to positively be part of the change so the immediate future and beyond looks more like God’s kin-dom?

Sometimes we only fight for what we know. I challenge you to go beyond that, with all that is moving and changing in the world…go beyond what you know.

What can you dream, what is your vision? - That is the role of the prophet, of the prophetic voice that the church is called to be in our society and the world.

Dream, use your holy imagination and then start engaging. Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

For everyone born – a place at the table.

For woman and man – a place at the table.

For young and for old – a place at the table.

For just and unjust – a place at the table.

For everyone born – a place at the table!

And God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace. Amen!

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