

Sharp, Pointed, Dangerous Words
 Christ Church, Cranbrook, Michigan
 Beatitudes & Micah 6:1-8
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May the God who Creates us, Redeems us and Sustains us—be with us now and remain with us always. Amen.

Please be seated.

Good Morning.

My name is Bonnie Perry
 and I am the rector at All Saints' in Chicago.
 We were lucky enough to have
 Beth Taylor work at All Saints
 for three years while she was in seminary.
 Gary Hall and I were colleagues in Chicago
 and I am just honored and delighted
 to be with you all this morning.

It was quite an ordination yesterday
 and your hospitality has been extraordinary.
 Thank you.

A year ago December I had the honor of preaching at another parishioner's
 ordination in Warwick, NY.
 It too was quite the celebration. And it
 was even worth
 traveling through O'Hare airport
 in the eye
 of two colliding snow storms
 just to be there.

But the thing is---

I am not
 a particularly happy air traveler.
 It is in so many ways
 —such an all or nothing proposition—
 don't you think? (pause)

So the morning of a trip,
 anxiety is birthed in my body

and then grows
and multiplies as
my time in the airport expands.

Two years ago
I had my right knee replaced
and so now
going through security
I always set off the alarm
and always require
a “female assist”.

My trip to Warwick, NY—
was no different.
Except this time
in addition
to being wanded and patted down—
my quart size bag
of personal hygiene products
attracted attention.
Apparently my hair thickener—
(although containing less than 20 ml)
was in a bottle
that could hold up to 150 ml
—the same with my toothpaste—
and even though
they both fit
quite nicely
in my quart size zip-lock—
both were confiscated
and I was roundly chastised.

Then another security official
picked up my suitcase
and informed me
that it too
needed to be searched.
There were some items in my suitcase
that raised suspicions
when it was scanned.
So,
as I endeavored
to put my
boots, bracelet and belt back on,
the agent rummaged through my bag—
removing first my vestments.

Then my clergy shirt.
 Next came my collar
 and then
 poking around
 down below my running pants
 he found “the items” in question.
 His hand emerged
 with my Prayerbook/Bible
 and then
 he went back in
 and this time
 came out with Eugene Peterson’s,
 The Message.
 The man delicately
 held out these two brick like books
 —and I looked at him with astonishment---
 “My Bibles?
 You needed to search my bag
 because of my Bibles?”

“Yes Ma’mam,” he said.
 Then holding them warily
 he asked me earnestly,
 “Is there anything
 [contained]
 in either one of these
 that is sharp, pointed, or dangerous?”

In response,
 my mouth dropped open,
 and I was momentarily speechless
 and then all I could think—
 was---
 well for starters
 there’s the Magnificat,
 and the words of the prophets
 the gospel of John,
 and don’t even get me started on Revelation
 —and didn’t Annie Dillard
 write a whole essay on [wearing crash test helmets in church because of
 the radical nature of the Gospel?

But because
 he looked like a man
 who didn’t have much use
 for metaphor---

I merely nodded my head
and resisted the
urge to start preaching
then and there.

Instead I took my newly searched suitcase
and was on my way.
And all I could think was
here I am
in airport hell
and sermonic heaven.

So—is there anything
that is
sharp, pointed and dangerous
contained in this book?
It is
nothing more and nothing less
than the word of God,
and God's proclamations
are a far cry
from soft, fluffy, bedtime stories
of our childhood.

The words of scripture
are radical,
they are dangerous...
this then is our issue.

If we claim to be Christians
and if we immerse ourselves
in our scripture
then we are bound
to use all that we have
to bring the kingdom of God closer.

I wondering does that scare you?
Because it terrifies me.
We are on a cliff—
we can step back from the edge
and leave our bibles closed—
tucked away
on book shelves and coffee tables.

We can leave them
in the hands

of our more
 evangelical fundamentalist
 sisters and brothers
 never unleashing
 or confronting the power contained therein.

Or—or we can open them
 and begin
 to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest.
 We can open them,
 read the texts
 and hold on
 because everything we know
 of the world will now up for grabs.

What does the Lord require of us?
 What does God want from us?
 It is pretty clear in Micah:
 the words of the prophet Micah
 whom we heard in our first reading.

Micah writing, speaking and nudging
 the people of Judah in the 8th century BC.
 Micah sees a world
 where the people have strayed from God's call.

He lives in a place
 where his sisters and brothers in the Northern Kingdom
 are about to be swallowed up
 by the Assyrians.

While the people of Judah—
 the province that contains Jerusalem—
 has managed to dodge the Assyrian bullet
 by disregarding God's call
 and allying themselves
 with the Assyrian's enemies.
 And in doing so
 compromise almost all of what they believe.
 Internally in Judah,
 class divisions are huge
 and the souls and spirits of all the people
 regardless of their wealth are withering.

It is in this situation
 that the sharp pointed words of this morning's text arise.

Listen again, and wonder with me.
 "What does the Lord require of us?"

What do you think?
 Do you ever find yourself wondering that?
 When you wake in the middle of the night

Do every hear yourself asking—
 looking out into your moonlit yards—
 do you ever hear yourself ask this question.
 "Oh God what do you want from me?"
 "How can I be a better person?"

Our nocturnal queries,
 echo through the ages.
 Countless ones before
 have awoken in middle age sleep patterns
 and done a quick,
 quiet accounting of their lives and wondered—
 What does the lord require of me?

This is how the prophet Micah
 of O so long ago answered this question:
 Shall we bow down before the Lord most high?
 Shall we make animal sacrifices and burnt offerings?
 What thing does God want?
 What does the Lord require?
 And here is his answer.
 For as we all know it in not a rhetorical question.

The answer is not what thing
 —the answer is who.
 God wants no thing from us
 rather—God wants us.
 God wants us.
 God longs for us
 to live our lives in a certain way.
 And Micah, in his sharp pointed dangerous words
 lays it all out for us.

It is simple actually—
 Do justice, Love kindness—walk humbly with our God...

What does that look like in Bloomfield Hills?
 What does that look like in Pontiac?
 What does that look like in Chicago or Sudan?

How then—dear friends will we live
our lives..

Do Justice—
Simply
use what we have,
the gifts, talents, and resources
to work for the people on the margins.
If for example,
as the rector of All Saints, Pontiac
told me,
the people in the city of Pontiac,
are severely lacking
decent grocery stores
to buy fresh produce for their children
—well then how do we use
our gifts and resources
to address that issue?
Do justice.

Love kindness—
risk loving, risk being vulnerable,
risk apologizing,
risk setting down and letting go
of those incredibly hurtful things
that we have a tendency to say
to the people whom we love the most.
Risk caring for the people in our lives
in such a way
that our broken hearts may be made whole.

Walk humbly with our God—
Micah reminds us
that our relationship with God
is ever changing, ever evolving.
It is not something
we figure out once
and never have to go back to again.

Our faith-life
is about walking with God.
We don't always have to have the believing part
—all sewed up.
Even Jesus' first request
of his disciples wasn't believe in me—
it was follow me.

Walk humbly with our God—
while this will not exempt us
from dark places or frightening times
—it will mean
that we will not be in those valleys alone.

Do justice, love kindness,
and walk humbly with your God.
A recipe for
completely transforming the world as we know it.

Ma'am is there anything sharp,
pointed or dangerous contained in these books?
Indeed there is and for this we say—
“thanks be to God.”
Amen.