

McCabe United Methodist Church
Faith for the 21st Century (part 3): Loving the Overlooked
Jeremiah 7:1-15; and Micah 6:6-8

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3-11-12

As we've discussed faith in the 21st Century, we have already talked about: Jesus' alternative wisdom; and Finding and Redefining our faith. Today, we're discussing Loving the Overlooked.

How many of you are pet loves? I grew up with both cats and dogs in our home. I enjoyed both the playfulness and independence of the cats. But I loved our dogs' social nature. It seemed like they would play with us for hours.

We had three different dogs when I was growing up and they were all wonderful companions. If I came home from school and wasn't greeting by our dog it seemed like something was wrong, or like my day was incomplete. Our dogs were part of the family. As a child I believed: "Home is where my dog is."

The Edwards family lived on the hills above Pasadena, California. In October of 1993, their family experienced the devastation of a wildfire that blew through the valley. They lost their home and all their possessions. After the fire there was virtually nothing left. They lost their nice home, decorations, furniture, pictures, dishes, pots and pans, and even things as simple as their socks.

When Megan wrote about the experience she said: Earlier that day they had a house full of stuff...nice stuff...sentimental stuff. Stuff they used

every day. Stuff stored in the closets and in the garage. But at the end of the day all that STUFF was gone...only ashes were left in their place.

Fortunately, the Edwards family: Megan, her husband Mark, and dog Marvin all survived without a scratch on them. In the midst of this tragedy they were given an opportunity to start over. They had the chance to examine their lives beyond their stuff.

before the fire she allowed what she owned to define who she was. She was nice, with nice stuff. She said, only when the STUFF was removed from her life was she able to discover a richer life.

Even though we haven't experienced a devastating fire we can discover a richer life by asking ourselves:

- ❖ What is life all about?
- ❖ What is truly important?
- ❖ What does it mean to have a home?
- ❖ Is home where my stuff is, or..."Is home where my family is?"

There is an irreverent comedian named George Carlin who made the following comments about our stuff:

That's all I want, that's all you need in life, is a little place for your stuff, ya know? Everybody's got a little place for their stuff. This is my stuff, that's your stuff, that'll be his stuff over there. That's all you need in life, a little place for your stuff.

That's all your house is: a place to keep your stuff. If you didn't have so much stuff, you wouldn't need a house. You could just walk around all the time. A house is just a pile of stuff with a cover on it. You can see that when you're taking off in an airplane. You look down, you see everybody's got a little pile of stuff.

And when you leave your house, you gotta lock it up. Wouldn't want somebody to come by and take some of your stuff. They always take the good stuff. They never bother with that [junk] you're saving. All they want is the shiny stuff. That's what your house is, a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get ... more stuff! Sometimes you gotta move, gotta get a bigger house. Why? No room for your stuff anymore.

It's important to take control of our lives by identifying the guiding principles we will follow. What are the underlying principles that will help us determine how we will live, especially when deciding how much stuff we need?

In today's scripture we heard from two prophets, Jeremiah and Micah, who were speaking to people who had lost their way. They lost track of what God had done for them and how God was calling them to live. The prophet Micah names it. He puts it out there for everyone to see. He tells people that God expects us to:

- ❖ Do justice,
- ❖ Love kindness,
- ❖ Walk humbly with your God

Doing justice. This means we care about people who are overlooked by society. We care about the children of people who are overlooked as much as we care about our own children. We do not exalt ourselves above others. We don't approve of or promote systems that overlook the needs of others, even though we ourselves might not be affected.

Loving kindness. We actively seek ways to show mercy and compassion toward others, especially those who have been overlooked, flattened by injustice. Those of us with a voice are called to speak up for the

overlooked.

Walk humbly with God. We do not put our wants above God's directives. We live in concert with our call to service and the ministry God placed before us.

That's what God wanted then. It is what God wants now.

Sometimes we make discipleship complicated. We tend to make discipleship about stuff. We focus on creeds, doctrines, dogmas, and denominational stances. We focus on committee meeting, church dinners, fundraising, and styles of worship. All of these things can become meaningless stuff, if we lose our focus. If we lose our focus it can obscure our vision of what God is calling us to do: Justice, Kindness, and walk with humility.

Unfortunately, the Christian Church, especially in developed nations, often forgets the clarity of Micah's message. We also forget the clarity of Luke 12:48b:

“From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.” (NRSV)

God has given us a great deal and God expects a lot from us. When we walk humbly with God we live in concert with his expectations and live in service to the God who has called us into ministry.

Who are we called to be in ministry to? Our neighbors. But do we know our neighbors? Do we know our North Dakota neighbors? Do we know the needs in our communities?

- ❖ In the year 2009, 14.1% of the children between ages 0-17 were living below the poverty level. (NDSU)
- ❖ Each month, an average of about 27,232 households in N.D. receives benefits from Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program. (nd.gov)
 - Forty-four percent of the program participants are children. (nd.gov)
 - 42 percent of the participant households are among the working poor. (nd.gov)

I hope we are humbled by the needs in our own communities and we are not afraid to face the greater needs found around the world.

Allow me to paraphrase Micah 6:6-8:

With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with the stuff in my closets and the stuff in my garage? Will the LORD be pleased if I amass a lifetime worth of stuff that sits around, seldom used? Shall I give my leftovers to the church and my scraps to the poor of this world?

God has told you, O people, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to speak out and work on the behalf of people who are overlooked, to use your voice in a manner which identifies the needs of those who have less than you do, and to live your lives in a way which reflects that all of God's children are of sacred value and worth.