

Today's gospel announces that peacemakers are the ones blessed to see God. War makers aren't even named. It is the poor and those who mourn who inherit the earth, though Jesus never glorifies poverty or sadness. Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly.

Jesus is joy – meaning God breaks into our lives daily with grace. That's why we come to the Eucharist often, so our eyes become accustomed to being fed by grace upon grace.

I had a dream recently where something was said that shouldn't have been. But once said, what's to be done? Apologizing is good, but that doesn't take back the words. There was a moment of agony in the dream, but then it turned to laughter. It was just a dream. No one heard the mis-speak – not even the pillow. All the dread of regret dissipated.

Did you hear such dissipation from our shared Confession and Forgiveness this morning? Sins are forgiven – dissipated. Weeping carries for the night, but joy comes in the morning. Life with God is life blessed with second chances. Trust in God's grace-filled love is what frees us to be peacemakers.

Today's Reading from Micah is clear. *“What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.”* Posters are made with this, and tee shirts. Equally important are the verses before this famous verse, but I've never seen the earlier verses on posters or tee shirts.

The earlier verses begin, “Thus says the Lord, God has a complaint against God's people.” In essence, why aren't people good to one another? Why don't you take care of the poor, the widow, the foreigner. “What have I done,” asks God, “that you don't care of each other?”

Micah then gives a Cliff notes history of God's endless faithfulness toward God's people – beginning with the exodus out of Egypt. Then Micah tells his hearers to remember the people God sent to help them: Moses, Aaron, even Miriam is mentioned.

As with all scripture, we're to see ourselves in this. What's God's history with us? Through which people have we been blessed? Remember the good things that have helped you. Bad things happen, of course, and we can learn from the bad. But bad doesn't need to define or become us. We don't have to empower our sufferings to deprive us of our potential for good.

As I've sat with the whole of our Micah reading, I've taking up its invitation to remember people through whom God has shown care for me. Gerry and Jan from Cal Lutheran came to mind – as did scenes with my mom and dad.

One memory emerged of my dad waiting to walk me down the aisle to marry Reg years ago. Dad stopped me at the start of the aisle, took my hand, bowed his head, closed his eyes, and said, “Thank you God for Peggy.” Then he entrusted me to a whole community of people there to support us as we embarked on now 48 years of marriage.

My dad's words blew me away. He was a man of few words – brilliant and complex, bearing post-trauma stress from being a young triage doctor in WWII – enduring horrors we heard of only through my mom. But what stood out as I did the remembering Micah calls us to was that tender moment.

Remember God's saving acts, says Micah. Savor them, not in denial of life's difficulties, but to keep difficulties in perspective. God's promise is to love us with second and third chances to be more than our hardships. God's love defines us, nothing less.

Then Micah reminds his hearers to remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. (You did great with those foreign words, Dan.) Micah wanted people to remember the humorous story of King Balak hiring Balaam to speak a curse against the people that instead of a curse, a blessing came out of his mouth.

Remember this, says Micah, how the bad can be turned on end and used by God for good. Trappist monk Thomas Merton wrote that God takes all our sins and uses them for good. That's our heritage. Grace upon grace! Remember that, says Micah.

Micah continues this condensed outline of God's saving acts by reminders of the move from Shittim to Gilgal. These were ancient cities on opposite sides of the Jordan River.

Gilgal was the land the people longed for, west of the Jordan. This area's in the news today – the West Bank of the Jordan River. Micah names Gilgal to remind hearers then and now to care for each other as God has cares for us.

Walter Brueggemann recently wrote a book called *The Promise* in which he explains how the giving of this land is conditional. There's an "if" involved. Receiving the promise goes hand in hand with the expectation of caring for the neighbor. Holding each other accountable to the care of neighbors matters to God, says the book of Micah.

The New Testaments says this too. *Love the neighbor*. The people ask, "What can we do to please you, God? Give you a young calf, a thousand rams, ten thousand rivers of oil, our first-born?" Micah responds, "Remember how God has cared for you – and respond in kind."

The fact is the motivation to do justice and love kindness comes from remembering that God – who is loving kindness – walks with us. This is the essence of the book of Micah.

Nurture practices of remembering your belovedness. Strengthen your core with remembrances of love. Then, without hesitation you will overflow in care toward neighbor.

Love begets love. Doing justice, loving kindness is response. We love because God first loves us. Breathe that in! Take and eat this love. It all begins with love.

Amen

+Pastor Peg, LCM, LA