

## Reflections - June 21, 2020,

### Micah 6:1-8 preached at Bolton United Church by Reverend Eleanor Scarlett.

Listen to what the LORD says: “Stand up, plead my case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. “Hear, you mountains, the LORD’s accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. “My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. Micah’s prophecy took place when Judea was faced with intense racial and unjust situations. The people were suffering greatly at the hands of those who were in power, they were voiceless and yearned for the day when they would once again experience justice. It was during this time that the prophet Micah received this message from God. “And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

As I read and re-read this text, I could not help but be drawn to Micah’s time and its similarity to our time. We have been seeing one execution after the other of Black and brown bodies in the USA as well as here in Canada. June is also that time of year when we celebrate Pride month a time to recognise LGBTQ2S+ who have suffered great injustices, inequalities, homophobia and oppression. We reflect, we ponder and we lament!

These words of God to Micah and the people of Judea was a call for how we should live our lives in the face of injustice. How do we as people of faith explore walking beyond barriers that are placed against us. Who are those walking beyond today barriers? The late Henry Nouwen reminds us that God is alive and well in our world today, especially with society’s poor and vulnerable. Those walking beyond societies barriers are today’s Aboriginals, Blacks, LGBTQ2S+, the homeless, refugees, migrant workers, under-paid and seasonal workers.

How do we as people of faith respond to those outside the barriers without being judgemental? I believe that we can learn from those living outside the barriers. These barriers are constructed barriers because we are afraid of those who are different from us, we are afraid because of deeply ingrained systems and ideologies of others, we are socialised to be afraid of the unknown. These barriers prevent us from fully experiencing God’s gift of transforming love for us.

Some theologians and Biblical scholars have argued that those walking beyond barriers are there to teach us the meaning of life. Frederick Buechner said it best, “The place where God calls you is the place where your deep joy meets the deep suffering of the world.” Buechner is not only naming what happens when something deep within connects with something deep without; he is also naming signs that authentically connects us to joy. Is it possible for the world’s oppressed to see signs of joy in the midst of their suffering? The people of Judea heard the words of God that Micah had spoken. “And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” As people of faith we too are called to discern the presence of God within us as we look for signs of joy in the midst of our suffering.

What can we take away from the events of these past weeks? It is my prayers that we may have the ability to listen deeply to the voices beyond the barriers. Those voices that ring deep within our souls and move us from our complacency to hear what they are saying to us today, and in the days to come. Those voices beyond the

barriers or outside the lines are the voice of Fannie Lou Hamer who coined the famous saying, "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired." They are the voice Nelson Mandela, "I have learned that courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it." They are the words of Mayor Keisha Buttens, "It broke me." They are the voice of Martin Luther King, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." These voices beyond the barriers have been crying out for years----, are we listening! Are we willing and ready to listen! What did Jesus say about those living beyond the barriers of his time? Matthew 15: 21-28, Here we have the story of Jesus and a Canaanite Woman, it is a dialogue between Jesus and this unknown woman, immediately upon learning that she had no name, it is not difficult to realise she was "Living beyond the barriers," in ancient society anyone without a name was living on the outside the city, in today's society those without names are also walking beyond barriers. One might say 'the more things change the more they stay the same.' The dialogue between Jesus and this woman continued for a while, Jesus was ready to give up, but this woman was not going anywhere, she was not prepared to go silently into the night. My friends this mother wanted something for her child and she was not prepared to walk away. Despite living outside the lines, she knew that she had to do whatever it took to get the healing for her child and so she pushed on. Jesus answered, "I was not sent for people like you!" I was sent to the lost sheep of Israel." Jesus was not yet aware that his calling went beyond boundaries, that he could do whatever he wanted. Sit with me awhile longer as we experience together this turn of event. The woman knelt before Jesus and poured her soul out saying. "Lord, help me!" Jesus replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread to the dogs." But this Sista-girlfriend was not taking a no for an answer. "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

Then Jesus answered in the only way he could, "Woman, great is your faith! Your request is granted." Her daughter was immediately healed. The turning point came when the woman who lives beyond the boundaries challenged Jesus, "even the dogs eat the crumbs that falls from their master's table." When you are down and out, when you have no where, or no one to turn to, you find the courage to cross the lines. Jesus recognised that his ministry went beyond borders, this woman's faith rooted in her oppression helped him recognise that he came not only for his people but for all peoples. Barriers can become destructive and dehumanizing if their desires are only to exclude. Racialized Immigrants and Refugees know this very well. When Jesus began this dialogue with this woman, he could not see past her ethnicity, that clouded his vision. In his mind she was not worthy of God's grace. There was something about this woman, despite being from outside the barriers, she knew who Jesus was, and what he could do for her and her child.

Hymn 651, Voices United reaffirms this, "Walls that divide are broken down, Christ is our Liberty! Chains that enslave are thrown aside; Christ is our liberty". If we are prepared to journey with those walking outside barriers we must be prepared to understand what this walking entails, sometimes this walking might be painful, it may take us to places we have never walked before, it may be a place that challenges us to the core of our faith.

I believe that if we are prepared to walk this walk, we must be willing to open our hearts to offer and to receive unconditional love, knowing that Christ is also present within society's poor and most vulnerable. God's love is stronger than hate. "As we reflect upon this old question, "And what does the Lord require of us but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God!"