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Epiphany 4 – Year A
Micah 6.1-8
Psalm 15
1 Corinthians 1.18-31
Matthew 5.1-12

In the name of the one, true, and living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

As a recovering lawyer, I always love a good courtroom drama – you know, like the old Perry Mason series or perhaps, more recently, the Boston Legal series. Well, in today's reading from the Hebrew Scriptures, we have a good courtroom drama! It's a lawsuit stemming from the covenant between God and God's people, with God as the plaintiff, God's people as the defendants, and the prophet Micah as God's attorney. How would you like that job?!! Micah is also God's prophet concerned primarily with ethical issues. He focuses on the crimes of self-serving officials, both religious and political, whom Micah attacks for their corruption and exploitation of the people. Micah rails against socioeconomic injustice. In his understanding, religious worship without social justice is meaningless. By the way, Micah's name means "who is like the Lord" – not a question but an exclamation underscoring the incomparability of God – so you know Micah is a worthy advocate for his God!

Remember the terms of the covenant between God and God's people, which is the basis of God's lawsuit. A covenant is a relationship initiated by God, to which a body of people responds in faith. God called Abraham and his descendants (that includes you and me) to be God's people and God would lead them into a land of abundance, flowing with milk and honey. (Even if you don't like honey in your milk, that's a metaphor for "good things.") In return, God asks God's people to be faithful, to obey God's commands, and to bring all the nations to God. Sounds like a fair deal!

Micah begins God's lawsuit against God's people by summoning the natural elements to be witnesses and jury: "Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel."

God, as the plaintiff, brings these charges against an ungrateful people: "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. [Remember that Moses, Aaron, and Miriam were the leaders of God's people as they wandered through the wilderness after God freed them as slaves in Egypt, eventually bringing the people back to God through obedience to God's Ten Commandments. God continues:] O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."

King Balak tried unsuccessfully to persuade God's prophet Balaam to curse the Israelite armies. Instead, God would not allow Balaam to curse God's people and, in fact, Balaam blessed the Israelite army so that they were victorious over the Moabites, and God's people could expand into that land as God had promised. And about now, you're probably wondering, what did happen from Shittim to Gilgal. (You can tell I'm having fun with this, can't you? – Almost as much fun as Fr. Simon!) Well, Shittim was the site of Israel's camp under Joshua east of the Jordan River, and Gilgal was the site of the Israelite camp after crossing the Jordan River and beginning the settlement of the

Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey that God had promised to give them.

It's now God's people's turn to defend themselves from these charges. God's people as the defendants offer their plea in the form of questions that could be considered offers of restitution: "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

Micah, as God's attorney, and as judge (okay – maybe Micah oversteps his role just like the lawyers on TV, but are you going to take on God's attorney?), Micah rejects the offer with these words: "[God] has told you, O mortal [literally, O Adam, charging the first human being for all who come after – "[God] has told you, O mortal] what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" – to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

In these troubling times, what does doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with your God look like for you? What does it mean to do justice? What does it mean to love kindness? What does it mean to walk humbly with your God? An answer came to me some years ago at a diocesan convention. The answer came in the startling and challenging blessing by my friend, Washington Bishop John Chane.

What does it mean to do justice? "May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relations, so that you may live deep within your

heart. May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.”

What does it mean to love kindness? “May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.”

What does it mean to walk humbly with your God? “[M]ay God bless you with enough foolishness [perhaps the foolishness Paul was talking about to the Corinthians of preaching Christ crucified, which is “foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” – enough foolishness] to believe that you can make a difference in the world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.”

In these troubling times. what does doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with your God look like for you? Could it look like the Beatitudes from Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” that we heard in this morning’s Gospel: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on [Jesus’] account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for

in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Prophets like Moses and Aaron and Miriam, prophets like Balaam, prophets like Micah?

Rather than preparing our defense, honing our arguments, and pleading our case against God’s charges, may we just face the facts. The covenant is clear: what does the Lord require of us but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God? Amen.