

## JUSTICE DOERS

MICAH 6:1-8

EPIPHANY 4

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What are the outward signs of a good Christian? The answer probably varies by church or denomination. I regularly share a few beers with a Christian Reformed Church friend who cannot believe that the Lutheran church does not require its members to give 1/10 of their income to the church.

I have another friend who recently started dating a Baptist and as a result, he can't have a beer at all anymore.

You may have followed the news these past few weeks and recall that the Roman Catholic Bishops in London Ontario and Calgary Alberta have written to their parishes and the federal government asking them to oppose changing the law to permit same sex marriages.

Christians from Pentecostal or Apostolic denominations are likely to define speaking in tongues and other such outpouring of charismatic enthusiasm as a sign of being good Christians.

For us as Lutherans, we probably have our own measuring sticks for faith. I would think that Baptism would be high on that list. Maybe not weekly, but attending church somewhat regularly would be on that list. Having our youth go through two years of confirmation is, I think, uniquely Lutheran.

Our reading from the Hebrew Scriptures this morning is a court case. It is a trial. It seems that God has

launched a lawsuit against the people of Israel accusing them of not being faithful to Yahweh.

In our opening verses, the Lord almighty challenges the people of Israel and gives his opening statement to the 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.” (v. 1-2)

The Lord then lists how much he has done for Israel over the years and how indebted they are to him. He has freed Israel from slavery in Egypt. He has given them strong leadership and good prophets. He has protected them on their way through the desert and given them victory over every enemy and country that sought to destroy them. He has given them their own land and their own country to call home.

And now God accuses them of “breach of contract”. In spite of all the things God has done for Israel, they continue to be faithless and disobedient.

In the trial, the people of Israel respond to the accusations with bewilderment. “What does the Lord require of us?” they ask.

In their defence they cry out, “Don't we come into the temple and bow before the God on high regularly?”

“Don't we come before him with burned offerings and young calves?”

In their defence, they list the key requirements of the Mosaic code: they have sacrificed offerings to the Lord; they have dedicated their firstborn to God as required in Exodus<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Ex 22:29-30.

“How much more will it take to make this God happy with us?” they ask.

“Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with then thousands of rivers of oil?”

It is in verse 8 that the judgment is rendered. The judge decides in favour of the plaintiff and he condemns Israel with these words, “God has told you what is good.”

And what is good? What does God require of them? All that God requires of us is to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

It’s easy for us to get trapped up in the trivialities of living out our faith. It’s easy to come up with a list: Good Christians don’t drink, and they don’t swear. Good Christians go to church, or they tithe. Good Christians are baptized and go to communion at least three times a year. They read their Bibles and pray at least three times a week. They don’t have sex before marriage and not very often inside of marriage. They put bumper stickers on their car, and they vote for a particular political party. The list might be different for different denominations or Christians, but it all boils down to Christians do this or don’t do that.

These lists may be good for some of us and they may even be good for all of us. These lists may be very useful ways to help us grow in our faith and live out our calling as God’s people. But they aren’t really what God requires of us and they aren’t really what we are called to do in the world around us.

To live out our calling, we have to be people of justice. We need to work to ensure that the hungry are fed; we have to ensure that we can help speak for those who—because of war, or oppression, or prejudice—have no voice. We need to protect the helpless and reach out in love to

those who have had very little kindness shown them in their lives.

We need to be humble. We need to see that life isn’t about us—it isn’t about how much we have or want or can get. It’s about looking out for those who cannot look out for themselves.

Doing justice is also an attractive quality to others. In an increasingly secularized society, what will make a strong first impression on those around us will not be the trivialities of our beliefs but the passion of our desire to do justice and treat other with kindness.

This is what God requires. These are the signs of living out our faith.