

Notes for Next Sunday
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Micah 6:1-8). This chapter depicts a courtroom scene in which the Lord lodges a legal complaint against Israel. In vv. 1–2 the Lord summons the people to listen to his accusation and to prepare their defense against the charges that follow in vv. 9–16. The Lord speaks in vv. 3–5, poignantly reminding the people of his gracious acts in their behalf. In vv. 6–7 Israel is speaking, and in v. 8 Micah responds directly to the nation, answering the questions of vv. 6–7.

Epistle (1 Corinthians 1:18-31). In the cultural context, one ought to remember that many early Christians were slaves or lower-class people. The critic Celsus observed of the Christians: “The following are the rules laid down by them. Let no one come to us who has been instructed, or who is wise or prudent (for such qualifications are deemed evil by us); but if there be any ignorant, or unintelligent, or uninstructed, or foolish persons, let them come with confidence. By which words, acknowledging that such individuals are worthy of their God, they manifestly show that they desire and are able to gain over only the silly, and the mean, and the stupid, with women and children.”

Gospel (Matthew 5:1-12). Jesus introduces His Sermon on the Mount with nine beatitudes that detail the future blessedness of His disciples. These promised blessings are God’s gracious gifts to those who repent of their sins and trust Christ for righteousness. Only after Jesus has assured His disciples of God’s goodness to them does He call on them, in the rest of His sermon, to be good and do good. When we recognize our own spiritual poverty, when the Lord leads us to hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness, when He makes us pure in heart so that we seek to worship only the true God, then we are blessed, now and forever. (TLSB)

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Micah 6:1-8

Listen to what the LORD says: “Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. ²Hear, O 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. ³“My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. ⁴I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. ⁵My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.” ⁶With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? ⁸He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

6:1–2 *mountains ... foundations of the earth.* Inanimate objects were called on as third-party witnesses because of their enduring nature and because they were witnesses to his covenant.

6:1 *Hear.* Micah turned his vision away from the future (chs 4–5) and directed the people to hear what God had to say to them (1:2; 6:2, 9). (TLSB)

plead your case before the mountains. The Lord put Israel on trial and called on the mountains to be the jury. (TLSB)

6:3 *My people.* Although the Israelites had forfeited His love and mercy by repeatedly breaking His covenant, the Lord still called them “my people.” He refused to turn His back on them. He simply couldn’t. He loved them. They were His covenant people. From them in the fullness of time the promised Messiah would come. But just because He cared for them, He had to bring charges against them, that they might be convicted and in penitence return to Him. (PBC)

6:5 *Balak ... Balaam.* As the Israelites drew near to their promised homeland, King Balak of Moab tried to harm Israel by hiring the heathen prophet Balaam to curse them. The Lord, however, commanded Balaam to bless the Israelites – four times in fact, and the one time he even proclaimed a Messianic prophecy. (Numbers 22-24). According to His promise to protect His people, the Lord had delivered them from the hands of evil men like Balak and Balaam. (PBC)

6:6-8 Character of the offerings goes from common to extraordinary to absurd. Some interpreters have argued from this passage that Israelite offerings originally included child sacrifice, commonly practiced by other nations. However, such an interpretation fails to appreciate the prophet’s rhetoric. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength. ²⁶ Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

1:18 *Message of the cross.* Paul has been arguing that reliance on one’s skill as a speaker can rob the cross of Christ of its power. He now sets out to cure the Corinthians of their fascination with rhetoric. After all, they should know that no matter how well they dress up the word of the cross, the world will always find it unpalatable. For the world marches to a different drummer. Its enthusiasm always is for whatever seems attractive and successful. Its basic orientation is toward what has aptly been called “the theology of glory.” But now, in opposition to the world’s lust for glamour, success, and “image,” Paul sets forth “the word [the theology] of the cross” (1:18–25). Only that sobering word will provide the Corinthians with a basis for overcoming their divisions and restoring their fellowship in Christ. (CC p. 64)

1:22 *Signs.* Judaism sought miraculous confirmation as God's support for messenger and message. (TLSB)

1:22 *Greeks look for wisdom.* True of Greeks in general, but especially of the Greek philosophers. (CSB)

The Gk for "philosophy" means "love of wisdom." (TLSB)

1:25 *Foolishness of God.* God's ways appear foolish to those who do not understand them (cf Is 55:8). (TLSB)

1:31 *let him who boasts boast in the Lord* – All gifts in v 30 are from God; therefore, all pride in ourselves is excluded. Though Jesus' death appears shameful and foolish, it is the only basis of our salvation. "We cannot boast of many merits and works, if they are viewed apart from grace and mercy" (SA III XIII 3). (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 5:1-12

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them, saying: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus began His sermon by nine times declaring His disciples blessed because of what God had in store for them. Jesus was not making ethical demands of His followers but was describing blessings they would fully enjoy in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1). The beatitudes are a common literary form found throughout Scripture (e.g., Ps. 1:1; Luke 11:28; Rev. 19:9) (TLSB)