

## Sermon for December 20, 2009 Advent IV C

### I. Micah lived in perilous times.

- A. The eighth century B.C.
- B. Israel peaked 300 years before, in David's rule in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.
- C. Largely downhill since.
  - 1. Bad kings who worshiped falsely.
  - 2. Frequent subjugation to Assyria, Egypt.
  - 3. Division of the kingdom north and south.
  - 4. Increasing perception by the common people that the Jerusalem elite was decadent, exploitative.
- D. Early 700s has been a brief reprieve.
  - 1. The great powers distracted by internal matters.
  - 2. Yet the payment of tribute a great burden, transferred to the rural poor.
- E. But Assyria attacked the northern kingdom in 722.
  - 1. Samaria fell; its elites deported.
  - 2. Refugees into Jerusalem.
  - 3. Enormous pressure on Judah, greater tribute.
  - 4. 701 BC, Sennacherib and his great general the Rabshekah invaded the southern Kingdom as well.
- F. That the context of Micah's prophecy.
  - 1. A kingdom under pressure.
  - 2. An urban elite, unresponsive to the needs of the people.
  - 3. Micah a native of Moresheth, a small place SW of Jerusalem.
  - 4. Culminating prophecy against Jerusalem and leaders in ch. 3: Listen, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel!  
Should you not know justice?—  
you who hate the good and love the evil,  
who tear the skin off my people,  
and the flesh off their bones;  
who eat the flesh of my people,  
flay their skin off them,  
break their bones in pieces,  
and chop them up like meat in a kettle,  
like flesh in a cauldron...

“Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob  
and chiefs of the house of Israel,”  
whose “rulers give judgment for a bribe,  
whose “priests teach for a price,”  
whose “prophets give oracles for money;”  
...Therefore because of you  
Zion shall be ploughed as a field;  
Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,  
and the mountain of the house a wooded height.  
5. A political prophet, diagnosing a political problem;  
the hope he announced understood as political for a  
long time.

## **II. Today’s selection from Micah 5 was understood to be about politics in the first instance.**

- A. Micah conjures David’s heritage: *But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.*
- B. From the same little town from where came David, son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, the youngest of his sons, the commoner who replaced Saul on the throne.
- C. Another to come from there, with the same heritage and family, dynastic origin.
- D. To rule in Israel. First heard as a prediction, promise for new and better king.
- E. One who would fix the political problem; do justice; change the tax and tribute system; make war successfully.
- F. Sadly, those who took the prophecy as such were disappointed.
  - 1. Jerusalem kings kept coming.
  - 2. City finally fell to the Babylonians in 587.
    - i. Reduced to ruins.
    - ii. Priests and princes deported.
    - iii. The line of David never restored after that.

## **III. So, the prophecy wrong or misunderstood?**

- A. Misunderstood, for a very long time, 800 years.

- B. 800 years of waiting for an earthly king like David.
- C. A mighty warrior, a cunning politician.

#### **IV. God fulfilled the prophecy in a better way.**

A. One came from Bethlehem, "to rule in Israel" but not in royal pomp.

1. His war horse a donkey, his only throne a Cross.
2. His weapons gentle speech, parables, and healing power.
3. His victory achieved through his death.

B. His origin was "from old, from ancient days," but his Davidic ancestry not the key.

1. His presence with the Father from before the foundations of the world.
2. He the one through whom all things were made.
3. The one "from old, from ancient days," who made all things and then entered into them in his incarnation.

C. Last verses of the prophecy show how much Micah did know; if his hearers did not. *And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.*

1. A shepherd king.
2. A maker of peace, rather than war.
3. A feeder of his flocks; giver of real security.

D. Surely he speaks of Jesus.

#### **V. Comfort for our perilous times; our misguided hopes.**

A. Israel yearned for a new David. For what do we yearn? What prophecies do we hang our hope upon?

1. Some for victory in our wars.
2. Some for health care reform.
3. New industry; more employment.
4. New friendships, an elusive soul mate.
5. Children dreaming of toys and bicycles and sweets.
6. More money, a better job.

- 7. Health and happiness of our children.
- B. Often we think we know what we want; we prophesy wrongly or receive prophecy from the culture and misunderstand.
- C. May spend our 80 years misunderstanding; hoping wrongly.
- D. The church may make grave errors, that last for 800 years, hoping wrongly.

**VI. But, eventually, God makes his way clear.**

- A. After 800 years of misplaced hopes, those two pregnant women embraced in greeting.
- B. The child leapt.
- C. Mary sang about a God fulfilling the promises of Micah through the humble and lowly.

**VII. My good news for you today is strange.**

- A. You and I probably misunderstand the world and God's will.
- B. Our hope is probably off a little; maybe a lot.
- C. We misunderstand the scriptures and the Christian hope.
- D. And it may take a long time for God to straighten us out.

**VIII. But God is doing better things than we can ask or imagine.**

- A. God has done so before and will again.
- B. That is the promise of Christmas.