

Harvest Meditation 2021 – Micah 6:8

Do justice.
Love mercy.
Walk humbly.

Harvest is one of the most wonderful times of the year... we are happy and thankful, full of joy... All is colourful and bright and beautiful.

I wish I could say this today just as I did some years ago. But how can I say this this year? How could I claim all is bright and beautiful?

We are living a second year with Covid and its consequences. Restrictions and limitations shape our lives, our relationships, our worship.

A second so-called African-style Harvest Festival without the abundance, the passion and the freedom of former years... We have the memories of hundreds of people, dances, hugs, auctions, and most delicious food eaten in a crowded fellowship hall.

Yes.

And nobody can take these memories away.

But this year, as last year, we can only do a part of what we'd love to do. Food-to-go, social distancing, keep 1,5mtr away from others when you dance, no auction, a limited number of people, masks, open doors even though it's chilly outside to keep the air in here somehow fresh... How strange, really!

And on top of that, the climate change, the floods and earthquakes, failed crops, and world hunger...

Nothing of these is beautiful and happy.

But as the theologian Walter Brueggemann says: "We Christians have an opportunity to declare that there is another narrative out of which we can live our lives. It is a narrative of generosity, and freedom, and forgiveness, and hospitality, and justice. It is the narrative of the future."

In other words: Because we believe in God and try to live respectfully and thankfully in his creation, we have a different story to tell. Not the story of decay and destruction, but the story of life and fullness. Not the story of fear and death, but the story of hope and resurrection. Not the story of standstill and stagnation, but the story of change and transformation.

As a church we are challenged and encouraged to find sources of hope so that we can be inspired to take action on the causes and consequences of climate change and all hardship it brings about.

Walter Brueggemann, who is an Old Testament professor, suggests that we go and seek advice from the prophets of old. They can, he says, inspire our imagination to offer an alternative vision in which the earth might be a different and better place, and then live that envisioned world into reality.

In other words: Let us celebrate our Harvest Festival as well as we can. Let us remember the beauty of the past and so develop pictures of beauty and healing for the future. And let us not only hold fast to those images of hope but let us work for them to come true.

Micah is one such biblical prophet.

We might wonder if someone writing millennia before greenhouse gas emissions and ecological breakdown has anything to contribute as a source of hope and inspiration for today.

Climate scientists and eco activists have been begging for the attention of the world in the past few decades. Micah begins his prophecy with a message that intends to go global: "Hear, you people, all of you; listen, O earth, and all that is in it." (Micah 1:2) Micah names and shames the corruption of political leaders, the dishonesty of the merchants, and the greed of those who control the use of land. He denounces their

exploitation and oppression of people and land. He sees these social injustices as consequences of the loss of faith in the living God.

Then and now we must name the powers of injustice, stand up against them, and take steps towards a vision of Shalom – to use the beautiful Old Testament term.

Then and now “false Gods” as self-interest, the belief in perpetual growth of everything, misuse of money, lead people away from a vision of peace and justice.

According to Micah, there’s a lot of woe coming to those in power who plan injustice and plot evil deeds on their beds. (2:1) And even more trouble is on its way for those who are bribed to proclaim that everything on earth is just as God would have it, and no harm will then befall us. (3:11-12)

Climate chaos is not only coming, it is already upon us, not as punishment from heaven but as a direct result of our behaviour. The harmful actions come mainly from us – the people living in the so-called first world countries, the global North. The impact is mostly suffered in the global South, among the poorest of the poor.

Mostly...

But slowly and surely, we do understand that the floods here in our country this summer, the masses of rain that lead to failed crops have to do with the climate change, too. ...and with the terrible exploitation of nature and the abuse of the natural resources on this earth.

Micah in his day, urged people to change their ways and transform the world they lived in.

“Act justly, and love mercy,
and walk humbly with your God,”
he says to the people, (6:8) because if they don’t,

“...the earth will become a desolate place because of its inhabitants as the result of their deeds.” (7:13)

Honestly, if Micah lived today, he couldn't say things more precisely. His message for us may sound as follows:

We must act on the crisis of climate change now. We must be responsible. We should be concerned on protecting our surroundings because this has been created for us.

We have the wisdom to know what is right and what is wrong.

We must see the link between our consumerist lifestyles, climate change and people's suffering in so many parts of the world. We must see that our growth-oriented system is driven by powerful economic interests set on making profits but harming people and destroying our planet.

Droughts drive people to the brink. Storms tear families apart. Raging waters show no mercy. Our world is falling apart. And only we have the power to stop it.

We know there is a better way. A way that restores justice to our broken world. A way that protects the future for all of us, our children, and our grandchildren.

God, speaking through Micah, presents us with a radical challenge.

Do justice

Love mercy.

Walk humbly.

We must learn to live with nature in harmony.

We must act with compassion for the wounded creation and for its hurting people.

We must loudly call for change.

We must remember that the earth belongs to God. And we are those who can join in God's mission of restoring the earth.

I want to keep this short... We all know what I mean.

Let me return to my sentence from the beginning.

In that respect, harvest is one of the most wonderful times of the year!

It reminds us of the beauty of God's world. It equips us with colourful and bright images of hope. And it awakens in us the desire and the power to resist destruction and work for renewal and transformation.

Amen.