

THE EXTERNALLY FOCUSED CHURCH: From Mercy to Justice Micah 6.1-8

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Matthew 9.9-13; Luke 5.27-32; Matthew 12.1-7

With these words, Jesus revealed his life's purpose and his values, and he invited those within the sound of his voice to deepen their understanding. He referred to a Scripture that we need to understand if we are to live as Jesus lived: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Interestingly, this is the only recorded teaching of Jesus in which he tells someone to "go and learn" the meaning of a scriptural passage.

Understanding Mercy

*What can I do with you, Ephraim?
What can I do with you, Judah?
Your love is like the morning mist,
like the early dew that disappears.*

*Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets,
I killed you with the words of my mouth;
my judgments flashed like lightning upon you.*

*For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,
and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. Hosea 6.4-8*

What is mercy? Mercy, most simply put, is God's attitude and action toward those in need or in distress. Mercy goes beyond pity (to feel sorry for) or compassion (to feel sorry with). Mercy is always expressed in actions (Luke 10.25-37).

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Luke 6.36

Act Justly, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly

There are many good things Christians can do to help and serve others. We need more acts of mercy and charity to salve the wounds of the world around us. Acts of service that demonstrate the love of God and move people toward Jesus are vital. But perhaps they are not enough. The prophet Micah reminds us of the three things God requires of us.

*He 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.** Micah 6.1-8*

Most churches help people know Christ and walk humbly with God. The church makes a critical transition when it looks outside its four walls and begins to extend mercy to those around it. This is the first step in becoming an externally focused church. But to act justly is much more difficult, for it seeks to address underlying causes more than symptoms.

To walk humbly with God –

Love Mercy –

Act Justly –