

## **“What God Loves”**

Micah 5:2-5

It came to pass, there was a certain minister who preached to his little flock of 'the world today,' 'modern man' and 'the history of the race.' Fred Craddock says a layman in the church complained to this preacher of not being addressed by the sermons, but his complaints were turned aside. The preacher just said the layman needed to break out of his small-mindedness and provincialism.

Craddock says, in the course of time, the minister and the layman attended a church convention together in a distant city. They were in the car together trying to make their way through the city to the meeting. The minister began getting anxious about losing their way in the large and busy metropolis. He asked the layman for a map. The Layman said he had something better than a map. Then he reached into the backseat of the car and produced a globe of the world. Saying, 'This oughta help you find your way.'

Sometimes when we talk about God or God's love it can sound so

general or ethereal we wonder where it touches the ground. Perhaps, we could start here: God doesn't just love 'the idea' of the world. John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world THAT"... Love demands particularity. It demands a subject or it isn't love. Love is directed somewhere. Some have said it's a verb. Verbs act upon something. The love that came down to us in the Christ is a love with direction. It acts. The prophet says it stands tall among us. Feeds us. Keeps us secure. And let's us know it's all going to be ok. This is the love that makes peace.

For God to be human he has to be from somewhere. Jesus needs a place. Not all places. Yet all places are his because of the place he had. And so — Bethlehem. The irony is— To be somebody you have to be from somewhere. But nobody is anybody there.

Bethlehem sits in the shadow of Jerusalem. Today it lies on the other side of the wall. You have to go through the gate with people guarding the wall with machine guns. When I was in Israel a few

years ago we got off a world class tour bus— you know with comfortable seats, screens and clean floors— and we got into unmarked brown vans. We were leaving Israel and entering Palestine... which is still Israel but just not as well groomed. The air is desperate. The light dimmer. The hills rise and fall over the land that bore us King David and King Jesus. Yet, there's no hope of another king or anyone of any repute coming from there again. "That was then," they might say. Now, Bethlehem relies on Christian tourists to come over and see the church of the Nativity and stop at the gift shop to buy an olive wood manger. The little town of Bethlehem is a modern Arab town of about 30,000 people. In Jesus' time it was a small village; it might have been as small as 200 people. What does it mean that Jesus was born there? What does it mean that God would become human and be born in an obscure village? It's like asking the question, 'What if God came down and was born to a waitress in Bulverde?'

*"But you, Bethlehem, though you are small... out of you will come one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."*

Micah is fed up with corruption and oppression. The Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They destroyed parts of Judah— claiming towns all around Jerusalem. Judah was overrun by refugees from the Northern tribes of Israel. For the sake of survival Judah paid exorbitant amounts of Taxes to Assyria to avoid being wiped off the map like their brothers and sisters in the Northern Kingdom. But, that tax wasn't paid by the king. The king passed the bill to the nobility who passed it on to the poor. Large landowners took from the small landowners. They pushed the peasant farmers off their land. They lowered wages and took bribes. Micah says they basically declared war against "those who put nothing into their mouths."

This is what the prophets of the bible do— they remind the comfortable that all are not comfortable. And until the day when all live in peace AND justice no comfort will be lasting. A system propped up by taking advantage on the poor will lead to ruin— in the 1st century or in the 21st century.

The good news is that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. But, the bible doesn't let us stay generic long. Saying God loves the globe is different from saying God came down to us in Bethlehem. God loves the world, yes. But, the incredible truth we find as we dig deeper is much harder to comprehend. We might find where the good news takes root in us.

God does incredible work in obscurity. Think about it. Obscurity is God's canvas— whether in Bethlehem or in some far corner of 'the mission field.' The power of God is latent in hidden things. The big bang started in nothingness. God's people are brought out of the dirt of Egypt— people so insignificant their's barely any record of them there. God's law is written on human hearts— a law discerned in the desert by a renegade shepherd. God's hope is hidden in a child, hidden in a manger. God is sending us a different kind of leader... the kind dreamt of by Micah. It's not the messiah Judah was anticipating. We might wonder about our own anticipation?

Our city is preparing for Christmas. Look around— Alamo Heights is

wrapped in garland and strung up in Christmas lights. La Cantera's parking lots are packed. Sea World's dolphins are flipping for Santa. Fiesta Texas is a winter wonderland even at a balmy 70 degrees. There are Santas in windows and nativity scenes on lawns. Greetings of 'Merry Christmas' are exchanged. We prepare for the coming One with lists and parties.

But, if God were to come to us wrapped in human flesh today, where would he go? Would there be room for him at Hotel Emma? Could his family get a table at La Fonda? Are we ready for Christmas? Micah would say, "NO." Micah would remind us of our responsibility to care for the Christ child. Because if Christ were born in Texas he would be among the 1 in 4 children living in poverty. The Christ child is on free lunch. Mary carries a WIC card.

And yet, silently (almost hidden) around the world this new leader, this shepherd is tending the flock. God's love is being acted out. In obscurity God's work is being done. It may not show up on your Facebook feed because the stories are too sensitive. At Emmanuel House in Macedonia a home is

being prepared for orphaned children. In Haiti a nurse named Jenny Jenkins and Lucien a deacon from Sinai Baptist created a mobile clinic to serve people in rural villages who don't have access to healthcare. On the Texas border Fellowship Southwest is building showers for immigrants. Outside of the spotlight God's love is acted out. Here in this place— Nicolas Merino of our congregation helped to translate the bible into his native Amuzgo language so that the people in his rural Mexican home could engage the scriptures.<sup>1</sup> Each Monday singers from our choir sing on the NICU floor of North Central Baptist Hospital bringing calm and hope to a desperate situation. And on Christmas Eve we will hear from one of our youth, Kayla Goodman, and the work she is doing for premature babies at the Children's hospital. These are all mission projects that flow out of the abundance of life in this place — life rooted in the Holy Spirit that flows out like a spring on Huebner Road. I encourage you today during the hymn of response to consider how you can respond— maybe you can write a check for the CBF Global missions offering. Incarnation starts in obscurity... hidden. And yet, this personal

touch of the divine changes everything. It's the love of God that is the base upon which all of this stands. It's the driving force. And it is the destination.

In his sermon at the Royal Wedding this year Bishop Michael Curry talked about the priest and geologist Pierre Theihard de Chardin. Pierre said the discovery and harnessing of fire was one of the great scientific and technological discoveries in all of human history. Fire made human civilization possible. Fire made it possible to cook food and to provide sanitary ways of eating, which reduced the spread of disease. Fire made it possible to heat homes, and thereby made human migration around the world a possibility, even into colder climates. There was no Bronze Age without fire, no Iron Age without fire, no Industrial Revolution without fire, no Communication Age without fire.

Fire drives the innovations that have shaped modern life— cars, planes, cellphones, and computers. Fire makes all that possible. And de Chardin said that capturing the energy of fire was one of the greatest discoveries of all of human history that catapulted

us forward. He then went on to say that if humanity ever captures the energy of love, it would be the second time in history that we have discovered fire.

Imagine if we truly trusted God enough to believe that we are loved. Imagine if we truly placed our hope in incarnation— not just the faith that Jesus was born long ago but that Christ is born in us today.

George H.W. Bush died a few weeks ago. There were a lot of great stories shared about what kind of man he was. For someone as accomplished as he, his humility was truly amazing. My favorite story about him came not from his own funeral but the funeral of his wife Barbara who died earlier this year. When the presidential historian Jon Meacham eloquently eulogized Barbara Bush, he ended by telling a story from two years ago. Barbara asked her husband a question. More than seventy years earlier, he had been an aviator in World War II. He was shot down in the Pacific and survived, though two of his crewmates were lost. George, you must have been saved for a reason, I know there had to be a reason? The 41st

president paused. He might have answered that he was saved so that he could one day be president, or father a president, or any number of other noble things. But he looked across the table and pointed the finger of his big left hand at her and said, 'You, you were the reason.'

God so loved the world— the entire globe. Yes, that's true. But, why would love come down and be born in obscurity? You are the reason.

<sup>1</sup> Read about it here: <https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/texas/bua-student-assists-bible-translation-native-language/>