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Micah 6:6-8

“With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” ⁸He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

From Psalm 15

O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?

²Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart...

... Those who do these things shall never be moved.

From 1 Corinthians 1:24-29

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ... Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?...²⁵For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength...²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are,²⁹ so that no one might boast in the presence of God. ...

From Matthew 5:1-12

...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... ¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ...¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, ...”

I do not want to spoil the Super Bowl for you. In fact, as your minister (sort of), I officially give you permission to watch the game. We’ll watch it too; we’ve got our snacks ready to go—It’s just that most of what you’ll see, including commercials and the half time show, directly contradicts our Christian faith. Do the violent hits, the deception by the quarterbacks, the self-indulgence in the ads, resemble the way of Jesus? Just thought you should know that, as you watch the game...on a Sunday, no less—I hope you enjoy it!

We don’t find contradictions just in football.

Our texts today seem very different—different writers, different times, different circumstances. But they *shout* one of the great ideas of our faith. Micah asks what’s often the core question of our faith journey: “What does God want from us?” Perhaps he was thinking of us when he speaks sarcastically about trying to impress God with “rivers of oil” before telling us: “Here’s what God really wants: justice, mercy, a humble walk of trust with God.” Psalm 15 asks a tongue-in-cheek question: Who are God’s favorites? And then he describes not a spiritual superstar, but an ordinary person being authentic, inside and out. What contradictions to what we expect: that God’s love must be earned, through hard work and sacrifice. Paul adds another contradiction: he says that God’s

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wisdom looks foolish to us—above all, the cross—but it's our logic and reason that are suspect.

Then in the Beatitudes, Jesus singles out people who seem to have nothing to be happy about in lives marked by loss, persecution, inner emptiness—and congratulates them. Think of other ways Jesus' teachings seem contradictory: *The greatest are those who serve...the last shall be first...love your enemies; pray for them even...forgive not just 7 times, but time after time after time ...unless you become little children, you'll never even see God's kingdom...blessed are the poor, the mourners, the persecuted.*

Contradiction is at the very heart of the way of Christ. It's not just that some things about our faith are mysterious (the Trinity). Faith itself embraces the contradiction between what we see and what we do not, yet, see.

To be fair, we deal with contradictions more often than we think. Our Pastor has deliberately stepped away *from* us for a while, in order to better minister *among* us. To make some plants grow better, we cut them back. To hit a golf ball farther, we don't swing as hard as we can. In football, they say, the best offense is a good defense. Forest fires are actually good for the forest...And we are most pleasing to God when we don't try to *impress* God. The good news for so many people whose lives are marked by pain and struggle: when you least expect it, it's precisely *then* that we can discover immeasurable joy and purpose.

Contradictions! But don't fear them—they're invitations to explore the mysteries of life, the world, and our wonderfully strange Gospel. That's why it's good to gather, and be reminded, week after week, of what we already know about the way of Christ, the Way that often seems illogical, impractical, foolish. To gather time and again with others who also face the temptation to back away from the way of Christ and follow a world that prizes power, wealth, fame, self-importance, and force. We need each other's help to not fall back into the path of self-interest that the world tells us is easier and more "sensible".

It's OK to watch the Super Bowl. Football's part of the world we live in, and we're called to love that world, even when parts of it trouble us. In the midst of violent collisions and brute force, we also may see courage and passion, in gifted players who are profoundly committed, holding nothing back. They may challenge us as well, to be part of a team here that embraces the challenges we face, and holds nothing back in our quest to live out God's dream for us.

In a few minutes, we will once again partake in what seems to be a contradiction. We will recall the suffering, humiliation and death of the one we dare to call God and Lord of all. We will have a morsel, just a bite, of bread, and barely a sip of the fruit of the vine, and we call it a "feast". In this beloved, life-giving contradiction, we say without words what words cannot contain, re-telling the larger contradiction of our grace-kissed lives: being loved as a gift we didn't earn, as people whose gift is to be a gift to others, in the spirit of Jesus, who became poor so we could be rich in spirit.

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