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Peace, Sun Prairie
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Epiphany 4

Micah 6:1-8

GOD'S GRACE IS ETERNAL

West of Waunakee is Indian Lake County Park. On the far side of the lake is the site of a once-thriving, but long-disappeared Native American village. Walking along the shore makes a person imagine the activity that must have been going on long ago. What chores were the men and women busily attending to? What games were the frolicking boys and girls playing right across your path? You are walking right where their teepees and lodges must have been standing. You look up at the surrounding hills. Did their trails wind through those hills? Did they organize great hunts or searches for berries in those forests? You think of all the things that the land where you are standing has witnessed throughout the ages.

In this portion of His Word, Micah 6, God turns our attention to the land surrounding Jerusalem with the same idea. He wants to give us a perspective on history and teach us an important truth about His grace. God's grace is eternal. Today let's learn first to know it from history that God's grace is eternal, and secondly, learn to trust it with your life.

Micah was a preacher who lived about the same time as Isaiah. You might recall that those were rough times for any believers who still existed. The society in which they lived had sunk to ever new lows politically, socially, morally, and religiously. They were so caught up in materialism and in their busy lives that God became an afterthought, going to church was just another option for things to do on the weekend, reading their own Bibles or saying bedtime prayers with their kids never happened. In their minds serving God was an inconvenience, worshipping Him a pain.

So God speaks like He is holding court. The hills and mountains around Jerusalem are the judge and jury. The mountain peaks had seen it all. Century after century of Jewish history passed before these silent observers. Micah preached this to the Jews: *"Listen to what the LORD says: 'Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. Hear, O mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and [his sister] Miriam.*

God's history lesson includes an enemy king named Balak. He hired a spiritualist named Balaam to put a curse, a hex, on Israel as they were entering the Promised Land. But God kept forcing Balaam to pronounce a blessing on them. God said, *"My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD."*

All of these things happened right there in the land where these people were living. They were the recipients of many centuries of God's kindness to their Jewish ancestors. It's like the way you and I had nothing to do with formulating the Constitution of the United States of America 200 years ago. But simply by living in this land we are benefiting from it today.

What the people in Jerusalem had, what they were, was the culmination of everything handed down to them from their ancestors by God's grace.

How could God have been a burden to them? He had only preserved their ancestors, protected them, given them everything, delivered them from peril time and again, forgiven them for rebelling time and again, and blessed them better than anything they could have hoped for on their own. They were there only because the God of history sheltered them through the centuries. They could learn from history, their own history, that God's grace

is eternal. It is never-ending. It is faithful and never fails. Nothing about it is burdensome or a drag. By looking at God's track record they could be certain that He would make good on His promise to keep preserving them until the Messiah came too. For that was His main purpose in preserving them.

History serves you and me in the same way. It shows us God's grace is eternal. The one event on which all of history hangs is Christ's death and resurrection. Before you were ever born God accomplished your rescue from death. He joyfully had this prepared for you like a present to surprise you with. Think how painstakingly He brought this good news to you –how many lives down through the centuries were used up to propagate this message, how many resources He burned up, how much toil, heartache, tears, sweat, suffering, and cost from many thousands He expended to preserve the message of Christ so that someday you would get to hear it. That's not even to mention the many miraculous episodes where He preserved people's lives, or kept them in the true faith, or preserved His Church beyond all human expectations –for us! Think what meticulous care He has taken, what particular pleasure in making sure the message got to you.

But think how often God and His Word and His Church have been an afterthought to us, a nuisance, an inconvenience, even a pain! How ungrateful we have been! How thoughtless we are! Our hearts are so corrupt. Dare we imagine that we could ever be in His good graces anymore?

Look at history for your answer –the history of Christ's sufferings and death on the cross. There you find that God's grace is eternal. Yes, you and I are forgiven. God still takes delight in telling you so. Consider your own personal history –how He washed your sin away in the waters of Holy Baptism, how He has always filled you up with His forgiveness again and again and again in the Lord's Supper. He has never failed to tell you, to show you, to give you a taste of freedom, to give you a glimpse of heaven.

God's grace is eternal. We know it from history. God has a perfect track record. Therefore we can trust it with our lives.

The rest of this reading from Micah is like a believer talking in response to God's grace. In short, it's like, "God has done so many wonderful things for me, how can I repay Him?" We read, *"With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"*

The answer, of course, is no. There is nothing you have that God wants. There's nothing you can give to Him. His grace is eternal. He gave it to you before you could have done anything to obtain it for yourself. Therefore instead of trying to pay God back, trust His eternal grace with your life. Here in Micah we are told how: *"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."*

These are the attitudes of someone who believes God has saved him. These words describe the way someone lives when they trust God's eternal grace, when they trust that God has shown them limitless mercy and immeasurable patience. Act justly: promote what is right, what is according to God's Word. Love mercy: Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Have the same compassion that He has. Walk humbly: Become a servant of everyone else. Recognize that everything you have is a gift freely given to you. Be repentant, recognize your sinfulness and rely only on His mercy and His mercy alone for Jesus' sake to get you into heaven.

Trusting God's eternal grace opens your awareness that you have nothing to lose if you give up everything of yourself to serve others. Your confidence that God will supply is evident in the way you live.

May we find comfort and strength and a new motive to entrust our lives to Him and to be used for His Kingdom in the simple truth that God's grace is eternal.