

Sermon Notes (Micah 6:6-8)

These sermon notes are based on the biblical texts presented in the ecumenical worship service: Micah 6:6-8; Galatians 3:26-28; Luke 24:13-35. Micah has been taken as the central text and the other two have been used to illuminate this text. The following dot points are presented in the hope that the preacher may find something to spark the imagination. Only the local preacher will know the local situation well enough to take these general themes and allow them to be interrogated by the experience of the congregation and then in turn to allow the texts to interrogate the local congregation.

- Each year the service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is prepared by a local church, and reflects the situation of that local church. Yet, participation in this service of worship is not dependent on our familiarity with the situation of that local church. For many in our Australian congregation, there will be no familiarity with the experience in India. But some among us will know this experience firsthand. In our own congregations there is diversity of many sorts, including cultural diversity. Some congregations struggle to display the unity they have in Christ. In subtle ways we can find ourselves divided around difference rather than united around diversity. At the outset, we hear the words of the prophet: with what shall we come before the Lord? During this Week of Prayer we come before the Lord with our cultural diversity.
- As we come before the Lord in worship we stand in solidarity with the experience of the Indian churches. Hearing their story, we ponder the question, “what does God require of us?” Several responses suggest themselves.
- An initial response will shift our focus from a too exclusive emphasis on our own local concerns, so that we see more clearly another people in another place. In its most elementary form our encounter with the Indian churches reminds us that the Christian faith is a global faith. The Christian church is a global church, a universal church. The unity God sets before us embraces the diversity of the human population. The very fact of encountering the experience of the Indian churches points to what God requires of us, namely to develop a breadth of vision so that we might see as God sees. God requires that we overcome any temptation to a myopic vision of unity that would simply make us feel comfortable with those around us.
- Our encounter with the Indian churches also alerts us to the fact that injustices still exist in the world. Injustice keeps peoples divided. As long as injustice exists unity is not possible, and the image of God is distorted. The message of the prophets – like Micah – proclaims that our God is a God of justice. Jesus himself proclaimed a kingdom where justice would be a sign of God’s reign. We cannot walk humbly with our God while we fail to act justly. We cannot love tenderly while we fail to act justly.
- It is not always easy to act justly. One may sometimes ask if the witness of the churches has been insufficient when certain unjust or discriminatory behaviours come to be the predominant ones in a society. Have Christians been silent? Or perhaps our own divisions and other behaviours have sapped credibility from our witness. Christian unity is an imperative if we are to fully engage with what God asks of us.
- Our encounter with the experience of the Indian churches also invites us to consider the relationship between unity, culture, and justice. There is a temptation to see Christian unity simply in institutional terms. This would be a very narrow

perspective. The abiding biblical message about unity is that it embraces the whole of creation – no more Jew or Greek! In our Western world where people easily separate a religious compartment of their lives from the rest of it, it is easy to ignore the existential unity that should be a sign of the reign of God. Only against this wider perspective can we think of the unity of the church. The institutional unity of the church should be a beacon or light on display for all to see. The church should give people even now a glimpse of what God has planned for all creation.

- In this service we worship God. Justice and unity are not simply *ideas* that we struggle with. Rather they are characteristics of God. What does God ask of us? To walk humbly with God. It requires great humility to realise that our efforts for unity and justice are ultimately connected to our praise of God. When we give glory to God, God's glory will be visible in us. What does God ask of us? To open our hands, to open our hearts and to receive the grace God offers. With God's gifts we can be genuine instruments in offering the world a new way of living the unity God offers.

Acknowledgement

This resource use in Australia is based on the international material for the 2013 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. To mark its centenary, the Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI) was invited to prepare the resources these were then agreed to by the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity. It has been adapted for use in Australia by the Faith and Unity Commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia.

The NCCA thanks the small working group adapting the resources for use in Australia; Sr Carmel Pilcher, Rev Dr Gerard Kelly, Canon Richard Tutin, Jela Virzi and Rev Meredith Williams for their contributions to the 2013 materials

An Explanation of the imagery

The use of the driftwood and the arrangement of native flowers on the altar to me help strengthen the question for this year's theme – What Does God Require of Us? For us as Australians the theme of Reconciliation is one of the paths that culminate in Christian Unity.

The NCCA acknowledges with appreciation the contribution of Artist: Raymond Trevaiks and the Photographer: Michael Stephenson.

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