

True Thanksgiving

Rev. D. Rietdijk († 1993) – Micah 6:6-8
(Thanksgiving)

Sing: Psalter 306

Read: Micha 6

Sing: Psalter 415: 2, 6, 7

Sing: Psalter 427:8

Sing: Psalter 438:4

Congregation, with the Lord's help we wish to minister the Word of God among you in this worship service, as you can find it in Micah 6, verses 6 through 8:

6 Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or 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?

8 He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

The words of our text speak of true Thanksgiving.

We wish to consider three points:

1. An unnecessary question (verses 6-7);
2. A divine requirement (doing justly, loving mercy, walking humbly with your God)
3. The revealed way (He hath showed thee what is good).

1. An unnecessary question

We have opened the Bible to the book of the prophet Micah. Micah was a prophet in Judah and he was a contemporary of Isaiah. This prophet's name is especially beautiful because the name Micah means: "Who is like the Lord?" Time and again when this name was mentioned or called out, Micah and the people that stood by him were reminded of this confession: 'Who is like the Lord, Who has set His eternal throne in the heavens?'

The God of Israel, the living God, is incomparable. He is great in power and rich in grace. "Who is like unto the LORD our God, Who raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth

the needy out of the dunghill” (Psalm 113:5,7). This echoes the meaning of Micah – who is like the LORD?

The Lord proclaimed by the mouth of the prophet Micah His mighty works of redemption which He wrought in the people of Israel. He had redeemed them from Egypt with a mighty hand. When Balak wanted to curse the people of Israel, he recruited Balaam. But Balaam could not do anything except bless them. The Lord watched over the people in many ways. He led them from Sittim all the way to Gilgal.

Now, after having listed all the mercies of the Lord, He inquires by the mouth of the prophet: “Israel, tell Me, how did I weary you? Come forward with your accusations and testify against Me. Tell Me what is wrong and how I supposedly failed you.”

The fact was that in spite of all God’s goodness Israel had gone astray and left the Lord. Instead of turning to the Lord because of all the blessings they had received, they wandered from God. For this reason God indicts His people with the words “Wherein have I wearied thee? I did nothing but good to thee. Why then turnest thou away from Me? How have I wronged thee?”

The Lord calls to witness even the ‘strong foundations of the earth’ (Micah 6:2). “Testify against Me: wherein have I wearied thee? How have I failed thee? Why turnest thou away from Me? Why forsakest thou Me?”

It is the ancient story that comes back continually in different ways: God, the good-doing God and a sinful people. God’s mercies and in contrast to that a people that forsake Him. God’s merciful kindness in contrast to the people’s guilt.

Congregation, boys and girls, isn’t this also something we have to address, especially on Thanksgiving Day? The Lord has been good to us. But if we ask ourselves the question: “Did we return to the Lord for all these privileges?” Then the answer cannot be affirmative. Neither did we turn to His Word, nor to His law. No, we and our nation have forsaken the Word and the law of the Lord. In no way are we any better than Israel. Our whole society has done evil in response to all the goodness God gave us.

If we only would begin to acknowledge our guilt before the Lord. If we only would confess before His countenance: “Lord, we have gone astray, we and our fathers have left Thy ways”. Then we would have a good Thanksgiving indeed. The Lord would be acknowledged in His goodness while we abase ourselves because of our guilt. Then it would truly be Thanksgiving.

Celebrating Thanksgiving is not merely saying “We thank Thee, Lord” and then continuing to live our sinful lives like Israel did. No, true Thanksgiving is turning to the Lord.

The Lord had asked Israel: “O My people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me” (Micah 6:3). And this is how Israel answered: “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?” (Micah 6:6). In other words: “Is it not sufficient what we do? All these sacrifices, everything we do in the service of the Lord, is that not enough? What more are we supposed to do?”

They strangely exaggerate when they claimed how they could do more for the Lord. They said, “Shall I come before the Lord with more burnt offerings? With what shall I bow myself before the high God? With burnt offerings? (Burnt offerings are sacrifices which are completely consumed on the altar.) They complain, “so many burnt offerings are sacrificed in the temple already, do we have to sacrifice even more? Is that what God requires of us? Shall we come before Him with calves of a year old?”

Congregation, that was a grave misrepresentation. The Lord never required from Israel to sacrifice one-year-old calves. Such calves were precious and costly. Indeed, the Lord required sacrifices of calves of eight days old, but nowhere in Leviticus do we read about sacrifices of those valuable year old calves.

Another distortion: “Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams? Or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?” True, the Lord commanded oil with the sacrifices, but surely not rivers of oil! Let alone thousands of rivers of oil or thousands of rams. The Lord did not demand this. Yet the people said, “Suppose we would offer it, would that be sufficient?” They even went a step further down the path of paganism when they said, “Shall we give our firstborns for a sacrifice? Shall we give the fruit of our body for the sins of our souls? Shall we also sacrifice our children?”

Congregation, you see how they exaggerate. The Lord never demanded the sacrifice of children. He never asked for the firstborn of Israel. God Himself gave His Only begotten Son; He sent Jesus to be the propitiation for our sins. But nowhere in Scripture does He ask for the lives of our firstborn. He does not demand the fruit of our body;; neither the rams, nor the rivers of oil or the calves of one year old.

Congregation, think about it, what a serious question it actually was. Imagine that the people of Israel would have been serious in their offer to sacrifice thousands of rams, tens of thousands of rivers of oil, calves of one year old, and to consecrate to the LORD the firstborns of their body! What a solemn case it would have been! It would testify of the people owning their guilt! It would show that they were seriously busy with seeking God’s

favour and His communion. People who speak like that would show only one desire: to be reconciled with God!

Congregation, if we read their question in this way, as a very serious question, you would wish that such a question would also be asked in our midst; that we also would sincerely and earnestly seek communion with God; that the desire for God's favor would really weigh; that at today's Thanksgiving we would pray, "Lord, what shall we offer Thee? How shall we come before Thee? Wherewith shall we bow ourselves before the high God?" When the sinfulness of sin begins to weigh in our lives, we will ask like questions, "How shall we come before the high God? Wherewith shall we bow ourselves before Him?"

Congregation, have you ever asked that question? When the Spirit of the Lord dwells in us, guilt will begin to weigh heavy. God's favor and communion become a solemnly felt need when we begin to see that we by nature live without them. These things become a serious reality in our lives. Then the question wells up, "How shall I come before the high God? Wherewith shall I bow myself before the high God?"

In our days many people do not even come to the conviction Israel had. Because of this lack of knowledge of sin and guilt no need of reconciliation with God is felt, neither is there an earnest desire for the forgiveness of our sins. And there is little seeking of the Lord and His communion.

If this would begin to weigh in our lives we would have no rest nor peace until we would be reconciled with God; until the guilt would be blotted out and the communion with God restored. How precious would the name of Jesus become, young people! His name would begin to shine in your heart. Congregation, how dear He would become to your soul, Him, the only begotten Son of the Father!

So, in a way we could say that the question of Israel contained something good. The fact that they took matters seriously is not wrong, is it? No, taking things seriously is not wrong. We can never take sin too seriously. Neither was there anything amiss with the worship of Israel – the service in which the gifts were offered to the Lord. After all, the worship service was instituted by the Lord Himself. The Lord says in His Word: "Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase" (Proverbs 3:9). So that was not the issue either.

The issue, the wrong, was this: despite all the lovingkindnesses of the Lord the people of Israel had departed from Him and strayed from keeping His laws. They did not want to walk in the ways of the Lord. Their relationship with God was not right. The fear of the Lord was

not found among Israel anymore and they did not want to acknowledge that before the face of the Lord. Congregation, that is what is wrong with the question of our text. In short, the issue is that the life with the Lord is missing.

Congregation, this is also the question for you and for me today. Is the life with the Lord lacking in our lives too? Is this communion with the Lord also missing in your lives, boys and girls? Because that is what really matters, if you live with the Lord, if you fear and serve Him, if you love Him. Truly celebrating Thanksgiving is not merely saying thanks to the Lord and attending church. No, serving the Lord involves all the facets of your life. Therefore we have to ask ourselves time and again this question: is my life a life with the Lord?

If we today, at Thanksgiving, have to come to the honest conclusion that we have no love to the Lord; if we have to confess in sincerity: “Lord, I do not have such a life” – then there is only one way to go: on your knees before God, confessing, “Lord, here lays a guilty one before Thy holy countenance; forgive me, I pray, all my sins; my sins that have defiled Thy majesty! Heal me, O Lord, and save my life! Let it become dedicated to Thy honor!” Congregation, there is still room with the Lord. He has come to seek and to save that which is lost. His Name is Jesus, Saviour!

We now wish to focus on:

2. The divine requirement

When Israel has asked all these questions, the Lord responds with these words: “What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” You see, the Lord’s answer does not make mention of rams or rivers of oil or first born children. No, three things are mentioned: to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God.

When it mentions “to love mercy”, we should not think in the first place of doing good to needy people. Of course, we may do that, but that is not what it is about in this text. The Hebrew word which is used here is very special in the Old Testament. The word “mercy” (or: “kindness” as in the Dutch translation) signifies that obligations are met – obligations that result from a relationship.

Among people we can find many relationships. I will mention a few examples: the relationship between a father and son, between a master and his servants, between a king and his subjects. Relationships bring obligations. A king has his obligations towards his subjects, but they in turn have their obligations towards their king. The same counts for the relationship between a father and his son. A father has obligations towards his children. He

has to provide for them, he has to care for them. But children, in turn, have also their obligations towards their parents. They ought to honor their parents and obey them.

The Lord also has a relationship with man. Concerning Israel it was the covenant that was made at Sinai. It is the Covenant of Grace, the covenant which was made in Christ and also confirmed by Christ. The Lord has set Himself under an obligation towards the people of Israel: He will take care of that people. It is the “mercy” of God. It is the faithfulness of God as He fulfills the obligations that result from the covenant. It is His covenant-faithfulness. That’s why His name is Jahweh, Jehovah, the faithful covenant God. He fulfills the obligations He has towards the covenant people.

But the people of Israel ought in turn to fulfill their obligations towards the Lord. They ought to serve the Lord the way He has commanded them in His Word. This is the “mercy” or “kindness” as is meant in our text: to observe the obligations that result from a relationship. The Lord fulfills His promises and they are to observe what He requires of His people. It means that the people of Israel are to walk in the fear of the Lord and to act according to the Word of God because the Lord had given His Word to them. What a privilege! No other nation received such a privilege. They lacked His testimonies and the mysteries of His covenant.

Congregation, the Lord also gave us His Word. He also gave us the sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace. May I remind you of the form of baptism which was read when you received the sign and seal of the covenant? At that time it was read that the triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, had made an eternal covenant of grace. He took upon Himself to provide us with every good thing, and avert all evil from us. God the Son took upon Himself to wash us in His blood from all our sins. God the Holy Spirit promised to dwell in us and to renew us, to daily renew us, till we shall finally be presented without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Yes, the form also mentions the second part. The obligation of us as partakers of the covenant to cleave to this one God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life.

Here then is the second part of the Covenant of Grace: to walk in the fear of the Lord. Here then is what the Lord requires from us, congregation, boys and girls. The sign on our forehead can never be washed away. The water will never dry up. The seal is engraved by God Himself. He proclaims: “I have bound you to My Name.”

Can you still serve the world with your baptized forehead? It cannot be. You probably begin to understand now what the Lord says to Israel. To serve the world with the sign of

God's kindness on your forehead is an impossibility. The Lord does not require mercy as a formal obligation, rather to *love* mercy. That is to say: you ought to desire with your whole heart to live in all godliness. It means to walk in a new and holy life and to crucify our old nature and to forsake the sinful world. "Love mercy" – You ought to *love* mercy – it requires more than formal obedience, it calls for your heart!

When God says to Israel: "Do not come with rams or rivers of oil or with your first born sons", He emphatically says: "I demand more, much more! I ask for your heart!" When will I desire to live in the ways of the Lord? When will I love mercy? When will I desire to walk in a new and holy life? Only when God, by His grace, through His Spirit, pours out His love in my heart. That is a fruit of grace alone. That is a fruit of the poured out love of Christ. Then you begin to love the Lord; you begin to love Him so much that you hate sin and desire His commandments. You begin to realize that the world with all its treasures hastens towards its destruction. But you also see that life is only to be found with God in the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

To love mercy is to desire to do all that the Lord commands us in His Word. Then we will begin to live differently. Then your Bible will remain open longer; you remain longer on your knees because you begin to ask: "O let Thy Spirit be my constant aid, That all my ways may ever be directed, To keep Thy statues so to be obeyed" (Psalter 428:2). And: "Unto me, O Lord Jehovah, Show Thy ways and teach Thou me, So that, by Thy Spirit guided, Clearly I Thy paths may see" (Psalter 415:2). Then you have much to ask from the Lord, much to plead for with God. "Lord, wilt Thou be my Guide and teach me to walk in the fear of God."

Congregation, there's another direction in our text: to do justly. Again we have to carefully consider the meaning of this word. It is not about giving each his rightful portion. Sometimes you hear that as a comment when someone has passed away: "He was a good man; he gave everyone his just portion." That is how someone is pictured as a good, upright man.

No, our text is not about giving each his just portion. Nowhere does Scripture teach us such a superficial self-examination. We people never live up to God's standard. There has been only One who met God's standard, who honored the law: Christ. He has perfectly done all that His Father demanded of Him. Our text speaks of a different justice. When Micah speaks about doing justly, he means the justice of God.

Micah is sometimes called the prophet of justice. Hosea is the prophet of love, of wounded love, but Micah is the prophet of justice; justice in the sense of what is due unto the Lord and what His statutes demand of me. To do justly is to bow under the authority of the Word of God in my life. This also is fruit of grace.

To love mercy and to do justly both pertain to the outward, visible side of our lives. They show themselves in our lives: if we live according to God's Word or not. But that comes from within. In our text the root is mentioned from which loving mercy and doing justly sprout. It is mentioned as the third aspect, namely: to walk humbly with thy God. From the humble walk with God stems loving mercy and doing justly. To give unto God what is due unto Him stems from humbly walking with God.

You may ask, What does it mean to "walk humbly" with God? In Genesis 5 you can read of people who became hundreds of years old, received children and passed away at a very old age. Time and again we read "and he died." But there is one exception; Enoch. In the midst of the list of people we read of him: "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). That's all we read of Enoch. His whole life consisted of walking with God.

Again, what does it mean to walk humbly with God? Walking with God is different from walking before God's countenance. The Lord said to Abraham: "Walk before Me and be thou perfect" (Genesis 17:1). That means that in word and deed you live in the knowledge that the judgment of God is over your actions, words and thoughts. To be upright is the realization that we owe God our obedience. It is obedience and showing thankfulness. It is celebrating Thanksgiving. It is walking before God's countenance.

It is written of David that he walked after the Lord, which means that he walked in the way the Lord wanted him to go instead of walking after Baal. To walk after Baal means that in everything you seek Baal, in everything you follow the world. David did not do that, in everything he sought the Lord. When you follow a person you watch that person, you focus on all that he says and does. But walking after the Lord is not the same as walking with God. That is yet something else.

To walk with God means that God in His Word has come up against us; that God has crossed our life's path and holds us by our right hand, as He did with Asaph. It means that God holds us by our right hand and starts to walk with us. It signifies communion, a relationship with God. "Yea, the secret of Jehovah, Is with those who fear His Name" (Psalter 415:7). Here then is something of this walking with God. It involves coming to know yourself as a lost person and finding the way to communion with God through Christ. It

means that you have found the way of life in Christ; the way to the Father and to the Father's heart.

Such a sinner comes to the realization that he cannot live or die without Christ, but that he needs the Lord in all things. As he flees to God with his guilt and condemnation he discovers that he needs the ministration of Christ and His eternal Spirit time and again. Then there is a dealing of a poor sinner with the living Christ. Then one begins to walk with God. Day and night you feel your need for the Lord in everything: at your work and in the church; in your family and in society. In all things!

This is what the Lord requires of us: to walk with God; to seek communion with Him who has come to seek and to save that which is lost. To walk in Christ with God as a poor sinner who lacks all things; who is foolish and knows nothing. As a deaf person who hears nothing. And yet, to need Him in all things, begging for His mercy, His love and His communion.

Do you know this life, congregation? This is a life of communion with God. That does not mean that you always seek a secluded place to bend your knees, it can even be that you're sitting in class and there, behind your desk, you feel your need for the Lord for that particular class. It can happen that you're in prayer while biking or driving your car, needing the Lord in all things. There can be days in the life of the Church of the Lord that they send a continuous prayer to Him all the day long, from the morning to the evening. That is the secret communion with the Lord.

Note the little word that is added: *humbly*. To walk humbly with God means to walk in deep conviction of our lowliness and our sinfulness; to bow before the Lord to whom we surrender unconditionally. To walk humbly means to be small and insignificant; to have nothing and to know nothing. It is to get to know yourself in all your lowliness and sinfulness. And so to be given grace to live on the ministration of the grace of Another. What a blessing it is to walk humbly with God. Then every day is Thanksgiving Day.

Mark also the addition: "with your God." The mere fact that God created us makes God "our God." Through whom else would we live, congregation? Paul the apostle said to the gentiles on the Areopagus in Athens: "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Creation alone already makes God 'our God'. But it is much greater to know our God through the covenant of which we spoke earlier. The Lord made a covenant with Israel: "I am the LORD thy God" (Exodus 20:2). "Thy God" – that is quite something!

But we go one step further. In Christ the love of the Father is revealed. The apostle John was privileged to experience it as he wrote: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us” (1 John 3:1), “and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1John 4:10). He who hears the heart of the Father beating will say: “Thou art my God!” Indeed, “my God” for the sake of Christ, the God who gives Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ, out of eternal love for sinners.

The more you taste of the love of this suffering and dying Christ, the more you will love mercy, do justly and walk humbly with God. It binds your soul to the service of the Lord. David sang about this in different Psalms. Hear him exclaim: “I love the Lord, the fount of life and grace; He hears my voice, my cry and supplication” (Psalter 426:1). He sang about the suffering Christ; of the stone which the builders rejected but which God made the foremost cornerstone. In faith he saw Jesus and that God was His God. Therefore he sang: “Thou art my God, I will extol Thee, And magnify Thy majesty;” “My God”, he extols, “in glory none excel Thee, Thy praise be to eternity” (Psalter 427:8). We wish to sing that together from Psalter 427:8.

*Thou art my God, I will extol Thee,
And magnify Thy majesty;
My God, in glory none excel Thee,
Thy praise be to eternity.
Let all exalt Jehovah's goodness,
For most compassionate is He;
His mercy, excellent in fullness,
Endureth to eternity.*

3. The revealed way

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” We preach that way to you also on this Thanksgiving Day. The way that is good. No, it does not mean what is useful for you or necessary for your life in society. Rather, what is necessary for the well-being of your soul, what gives life to your soul. “This the Lord has showed thee, O man!” (as our text says). The expression “O man” points to the insignificance of man as creature compared to the high God.

How low did the Lord descend when He showed or made known unto you His Word, boys and girls! In His Word He has described the good way. What compassion! What immeasurable love this is! That the Lord stoops down to us all with His Word and says: “The way is shown thee, o man!”

The people of Israel in the days of Micah could not be excused. If they come with questions like those about the rams and the rivers of oil then there is no excuse. The Lord says: “I have told you what you ought to do: to love mercy, to do justly and walk humbly with your God! You know that way! I have revealed it to you, have I not?” Posing pointless questions shows your guilt.

Congregation, so also is the message for our time, on this Thanksgiving Day. Thousands of people do not live according to the will of God. They live a morally loose life. Maybe they sooth themselves with the thought that they are on their way to eternal happiness. But they’re making a terrible mistake! They will end up hugely disappointed. We cannot say: “They didn’t know any better,” because the Lord let His Name be proclaimed on this earth. The people in the days of Micah heard the way. In our time the same can be heard because the doors of the church are open. The Word of God is obtainable for a price that no other book can be bought for. It is preached everywhere. He who does not know the will of God has to acknowledge that he does not want to know it.

It is also true for us and for our young people: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good.” It is the way in Christ. There is no other way! Whatever way is pointed out to you other than this way, has a dead end. This way, however, is the Way! Listen: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). And no man – and that means, nobody – can come to the Father but by Him.

This way we preach also at this Thanksgiving, congregation. When sinful men or women, boys or girls come to the feet of the Lord lamenting their soul’s needs, then we will see it in their lives. Mercy will be loved, justice will be done. They will have the fear of the Lord and live a life according to the Word of God.

Is that life to be found with us? And young people, with you? The Lord also requires something of us. No, rather, He requires everything! He requires your heart. “My son, (my daughter), give Me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe My ways.” To what or whom do we give our hearts? To something or someone we value very much. You can give it to the world, but you will perish with it. You can give it to your work – we can do our work with great zeal and commitment and that is good – but we may not give our hearts to it. Our hearts, our inner man, have to be dedicated to the Lord.

Maybe there is someone here who says: “But I have tried that and I fail. I’ve tried it so often in so many ways, but time and again I fail.” Well, then I have advice for you. Go unto

the Lord and tell Him: “Lord, I can’t do it. I fail. Wilt Thou take my heart and make it so, that by the power of Thy Spirit, I may honor and serve and fear Thee as Thou art worthy! Take my heart, O Lord, and let it be consecrated to Thy honor!”

The Lord also asks for the heart of our elderly ones. He asks for that old heart, that cold, hard heart, which has become so stiff that it has become almost immoveable. Pray to the Lord and say: “O God, there is never any change to be expected from my side anymore. But wilt Thou take this callous, cold, lifeless and hard heart and break it by Thy love?” Know that He even wants to have that old heart. O give it then into His hands. You will profit so much from it. Because there is not a more blessed life than this life with Christ, this life at the feet of Christ; as a poor sinner to live on Him alone.

The world requires you to be something, to have something. You have to be meaningful. But at the feet of the blessed Lord Jesus no one has to be something. There you may only be a poor sinner, who empty, naked, poor and lost lays himself at His feet. There you may be a sinner because He saves that which is lost. Be assured that the Lord will not deceive anyone. When the Lord speaks to your soul through His Word and Spirit you will not be deceived! It is the Word on which my soul has hoped – this Word will certainly be fulfilled.

Of Enoch it is written: “And Enoch walked with God”, followed directly with: “and he was not.” In the letter to the Hebrews it says: “and was not found” (Hebrews 11:5). Apparently they had looked for him. Enoch was a highly respected man, a man radiating godliness, a man who loved mercy, who did justice. A man in whose life it was obvious that he walked with the Lord. They searched for him, but he was not found because God took him in a moment. He was not, because he was in heaven, this Enoch, to eternally praise God before His throne.

Walking with God will be opposed; Satan can fight it, but know that it can never be confounded because at the end of their journey a place is prepared for them to be eternally with the Lord. Mark the walk of the godly and the upright, and behold their end, for their end will be peace; true peace, everlasting peace with God. Then it is eternal Thanksgiving, because God will receive all honor and our souls will be granted salvation.

Amen.

Closing Psalter: Psalter 438:4

*Moreover, they forewarn
Thy servant that he scorn
All evil ways, O Lord.
He that in faith on Thee
Observes them piously
Shall reap a great reward.
But, Lord, where is the man
Who with precision can
Discern his every error?
Thou fount of joy divine,
O clear this heart of mine
From secret faults forever!*