



Welcome and opening prayer

Welcome to our Sunday morning service. After a long time of not going anywhere, I had to drive to Norwich the other day. It was a beautiful day. The journey went well and we couldn't NOT notice the beauty of the countryside. We live in a beautiful country indeed. I am not saying there is no space for improvement, but the level of stability, respect and freedom is appealing to people who might not have these privileges in their homes. This also makes the country beautiful. I believe it is all by God's grace that we have what we have in here. Let's worship the author and creator of this beauty, and the one who sent his Son Jesus Christ to restore all that has been corrupted.

This Sunday is Refugee week Sunday and we also remember Father's day. In our worship, let's focus on Jesus. The friend who understands our fears and pains who became one of us and laid his life for ours. As we read in Hebrews 4:15

“ we do not have a High priest who can't sympathize with our weaknesses, but instead one who was tempted in every way that we are, except without sin. “

Prayer Lord Jesus, you knew what it was to be a refugee, when your parents fled from Herod. You knew what it was to be homeless with nowhere to lay your head. You knew what it was to be friendless, when those you loved betrayed you. You knew what it was to be utterly derelict, as you cried from the cross ...

As we enjoy the beauty of creation, the works of your hands, we also praise you for your sacrifice on the cross, your forgiveness of our sins which can bring so much healing to all people and the land we live in. Help us to worship you in Spirit and truth and lead us into your presence we pray.

Hymn 10 000 Reasons, Mission Praise 1259, by Third Avenue Worship group

We pray together

Beautiful God, we praise and worship you – your loving kindness and mercy is without end. Your faithfulness to us is unending.

As we truly worship in your presence, your spirit teaches us about sin. We can see our true self. Our selfishness, unkindness, lack of love. The spirit of repentance we say sorry, and we ask your forgiveness. We call on the name of Jesus.

We thank you that in Jesus you say to each of us, 'my child your sins are forgiven, go in peace and sin no more'.

We thank you that you give us your Spirit to help us know you and be closer to you.

We thank you that when we come to you, you don't wait for us to be clever enough, good enough, or perfect enough – you show no favouritism, your forgiveness and restoration in Jesus is for everyone.

We also thank you for people who have shown us what your love is like, remembering that you want us to become a part of this continuous testimony of your grace.

We bring our prayers in Jesus name. Amen.

Bible readings

Micah 4, 1-5 by Daniel Z.

Mark 15, 22-39 by Kathy S.

Reflection

Micah is a prophet in the time of a divided kingdom. The time when Assyria (modern time Syria) was about to capture the Northern part, Samaria, and rule over the region until the next superpower, Babylonia, succeeded. Micah doesn't introduce himself in much detail, but we know that the meaning of his name is "who is like God?" This rhetoric question is consequently a proclamation or confession that there is no other God, than the God of Israel. Especially for the people of this God, any deviation from this statement is a big problem. And this is what Micah's prophecy is very much about. Micah uncovers hypocrisy, injustice, unbelief on every level of his community. Even preaching is corrupted and done on demand, not really saying what God is saying, but what people would like to hear. This critical voice is carried throughout other prophets' messages as well. We can hear this voice also in the New Testament. 1Tim1,19

Chapter 4, which is the portion of our reading today, is in such a contrast to the first three chapters. Nothing introduces this radical change in the tone of the writing. There might be some ha-ha we do not see today. Micah speaks about the future in such a positive light.

"In the days to come ..."

We can find a similar message in Isaiah 2. It is a message of hope and restoration. I like the language of this chapter. Have you noticed?

"... in the days to come the mountain of the Lord's house will be the highest of the mountains... people will stream to it, many nations will ..."

Today a lots of people live stream to worship services to hear the word of God speaking to us, to pray and ask for council, healing, guidance, instruction. Not just the church members, but all nations, different people. People encourage each other "to stream in" saying

"come let's go up. ... so we may walk in God's ways"

Micah continues, saying that it will be God who will judge between the nations:

"to settle disputes between mighty nations which are far away"

We are thinking about millions of refugees forced from their homes, driven by fear or perhaps even just a mere desire for an easier life, waiting on the borders of many wealthy countries. They are receiving judgment often too unfitting for their real needs, potential and hidden motives.

And Micah doesn't stop, his faith is rather ambitious but it should be with all of us like that. Nothing is impossible for God. In several places of NT writings we are particularly reminded to think big. Micah is talking about something nobody would ever imagine! The end of wars, and the end of fighting. No more hoo-ha no more kerfuffle.

"Nations will no longer learn how to make war"

This kind of future establishment is unthinkable and so it is often classed as messianic, an eschatological future, the time after a final judgment. Micah mentioned that people will sit under their own grapevines and their own fig tree. This has symbolism. The Grapevine is a biblical symbol of life, while the fig tree is symbolising the dark side, evil, and death. Yet Micah sees people sitting peacefully under these two opposites with no fear or concern.

"There will be no one to terrify them, because the Lord of the Heavenly forces has spoken"

The prophet Isaiah expressed similar thoughts in 11:16 "wolf with a lamb" In OT these two symbols of a vine and a fig tree appear often together (15X) they represent the polarity of life and death. Sitting under both of them without fear means that this polarity has been reconciled. Life is not endangered by death.

Where is that mountain? Where is such a place full of counsel, power and respect? The place where people want to run with expectation, hope and a future? We might have many mountains which attract our hopes. For their natural beauty, location, mineral resources, special memories. I want to look at Jesus. He stood on several important mountains. Do we remember some of those? (*the sermon on the mount, transfiguration on the mount, prayer on the mount of Olives, feeding 5000*)

The **mountain of the Lord** for me is Golgotha. The place where Jesus displayed our true nature and yet finished what no one was ever able to do. He took our sins away, carrying them on the cross, in suffering he broke the power of death. It is personal, powerful and the only way I could experience that my sins were wiped out and God looks at me as a new creation.

We are all potential or actual refugees. The peace and stability of our lives is fragile. We might have many mountains of hope, but there is only one mountain where there is the real hope.

The cross of Christ is the time and place in history, but it wants to be a time and place in our hearts, where all can happen. This is our mountain experience which can return us to life, regardless of what situation we might be in. Whether we flee from persecution, strive to feed our family or live in comfort and plenty. This mountain is essential to me and to my enemies. There is no favouritism, we all need to meet Jesus at Golgotha. To be confronted with the price God paid for our lives so we can value it above all. I was a refugee all my life. I run away from God. But when I saw Jesus on the cross I found home, I found future and I want to hold fast to it.

Hymn Mighty To Save Singing The Faith 627, by Third Avenue Worship group

Prayers of intercession

By L.B. from Sittingbourne

Hymn Faithful One Singing The Faith 628, by Third Avenue Worship group

Blessing Psalm 121

