**Intro:**

The world is an unfair place. Everywhere we go, it seems like there is injustice, division, and heartbreak. These feelings aren't new. In the short book of Micah, the prophet, whose name means "who is like Yahweh (Yah-whey) shares the greatness of God through prophecy of judgment and salvation. The book of Micah also shows Micah's passion for the poor and oppressed. In these coming weeks, let us live faithfully in complicated times.

**Scripture: Micah 1:2-5, 8-9, 16**

Hear, you peoples, all of you; listen, O earth, and all that is in it, [2] and let the
Lord GOD be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. [3]For the
LORD is coming out of his place and will come down and tread upon the high
places of the earth. [4]Then the mountains will melt under him, and the valleys
will burst open like wax near the fire, like waters poured down a slope. [5] All
this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel.
What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the high
place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?
[8] For this I will lament and wail; I will go barefoot and naked; I will make
lamentation like the jackals and mourning like the ostriches. [9] For her wound is
incurable. It has come to Judah; it has reached to the gate of my people, to
Jerusalem.
[16] Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair for your pampered children;
make yourselves as bald as the eagle, for they have gone from you into exile.

**Sermon: Paying Attention**

We begin the book of Micah through submersion. And by that I mean there is no introduction to Micah's words of warning from God. Verse one of this chapter simply shares that God chose Micah to address Samaria and Jerusalem. From there, we hear, "Hear, you peoples, all of you; listen. God is mad!" or something like that. There is a reminder through this warning that even those whom God has chosen as special are not exempt from punishment. We are certainly submerged into what God has charged Micah to share with God's people.

Did you hear the description of God's presence in this scripture? It wasn't even as soft as what I shared earlier. It isn't that God was just mad. God's wrath was coming. Now whether God would truly physically melt the mountains or burst open the valleys can be left up to the interpreter. But what a showstopper! Can you imagine? The almighty God planned to punish the people who had turned so drastically away from God that they were no longer distinguishable from the rest of the world. They would be destroyed as a people. This meant that the people would be separated from each other, their possessions would be turned to havoc, and their traditions would be scorned.

In this first warning from Micah, he spoke to the people of Samaria and Jerusalem. Let's remember, though, that the people of the capital of Israel's northern kingdom, the people of Samaria, were also known as the Samaritans—the same people whose descendants were used in the parable of The Good Samaritan. We may be used to only hearing about the Samaritans when the Jewish people of the New Testament discredited them as heretics, yet here it is shared with us that, yes, they too were a part of God's people. These heretics were equated and looked on as equals to the people of Jerusalem. Both had done the same damage.

*"Hear, you peoples, all of you; listen, O earth, and all that is in it, [2] and let the Lord GOD be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. [3]For the LORD is coming out of his place and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth."*

But Micah didn't just shame the people; the nations. He mourned with them as well. These were his people! He told them that he would wail. He regretted how life had progressed. His people had turned to others in worship. His people had done things that did not reflect God. Hope was lost. But why on earth are there references to animals when it comes to the mourning and lamenting of the people?

Interestingly enough, jackals lament through a distinct series of high-pitched wails, yelps, and rising melodic howls that often sound like human crying or a distant siren. This sounds like something humans could do. But ostriches are more interesting. Ostriches don't gather around their deceased companions or

visit the site for years after, like elephants. Rather, the male ostrich makes a deep, muffled booming sound in its mourning. When feeling isolated or in distress, they produce eerie, hoarse cries that resemble the sobbing of a child. Hmm.

And then after all that, getting the people's attention, sharing his grief, he told them to join in the lamenting repentance. "**16** Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair for your pampered [or beloved] children; make yourselves as bald as the eagle, for they have gone from you into exile."

To be a prophet, knowing what was coming for his people, must have crushed Micah, yet he knew his job was oh so very important.

It makes me wonder: how is God using us not in full prophetic ways, but in prophetic-like ways? When we talk with individuals, with groups, with our leaders, with our government officials about what we believe are dangers, what is our motivation? (And friends, I'm not talking about our literal church building and its implications.) I'm talking about the injustices of the world. Certainly those who are going hungry, who are living without shelter, who are not getting their health needs met, etcetera, deserve more than continual disaster. We are called to speak into the justice, compassion, and equality of all. So, in our advocacy, are we persisting in our message, against all odds, simply because it is the truth and needs to be spoken by someone? Are we just letting the pain continue? Any of us who are concerned to make a better world and avoid suffering can identify with Micah's task (and so many other prophets').

Hear these words from one Book of Micah commentator, "To be a prophet is a very painful calling. The words that are spoken may be so horrible that the speaker is moved to tears by them. The prophet's pain is even worse than that of others because he sees with such clarity what lies ahead." Do we see then why Micah explains that he himself would wail? "Biblical prophets felt great compassion for their people. If they hated those whose behavior they condemned, their task would have been easier."

So as we look at this scripture and our life as we see it, may we acknowledge that in this time when we are so uncertain about where the next month, year, decade may lead, let us point ourselves back to our call to worship, back to important words in 2 Chronicles 20:12, “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”

Let me take you on a small rabbit trail. In the book of 2 Chronicles, King Jehoshaphat, one of the kings who followed God, was up against an army more than three times the size of his, and he was afraid for all the women and children. His prayer to God was beautiful (check it out in 2 Chronicles chapter 20). He ended his prayer with, “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”

So, friends, even when the world seems to have lost all hope, let us be ones who not only hear God in all ways, but, most of all, let us keep our eyes on God.

Let us pray…(a silent reflection)
Amen.