

Do you remember the short, observations on life from Saturday Night Live called *Deep Thoughts by Jack Handey*? Here is one of my favorites: “If a kid asks where rain comes from, I think a cute thing to tell him is “God is crying.” And if he asks why God is crying, another cute thing to tell him is “Probably because of something you did.”

It’s good that God doesn’t cry every time we do something against God’s intention for the world. It would be constantly raining and the whole world would be under water by now. In the first part of our scripture for today, we see that God is really upset with the Israelites. Even after God saved them from their enemies and sent them leaders to help them, they have forgotten all that God has done for them. They continue to turn their back on God.

God calls out their behavior and demands an answer to his question: “What have I done to you?” (v. 3) to cause such disobedience. The people answer by asking what God requires: Is it sacrifices and offerings? Is God so angry because they haven’t kept their religious rituals? A bit of deflection there. Then, Micah, the prophet, answers the question for them: “God has told you what is required, what is good – to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God” (v.8). God doesn’t want empty words or obligated offerings. God wants us to do good, and to have it come from our hearts.

The Israelites were not doing good nor do we. I’m sure we have caused God many tears with our hurtful words and actions. By we, I mean, humanity. It all started in the garden, when we wanted the one fruit we couldn’t have. We had

everything we could possibly want until God said, “Don’t eat from that tree.” We couldn’t think about anything else except that forbidden fruit. We weren’t going to let anyone stop us from getting that fruit. We wanted to be God. We wanted what God had – power and knowledge – and boy, did we get it.

Along with some pretty heavy consequences. Any time we turn our back on God, any time we do the opposite of what God requires of us, we cause suffering. I’m not talking about suffering from diseases. I’m talking about suffering from sinful choices. I said last week that cancer and disease are just part of this world, part of God’s creation, but war and suffering are on us.

Several of you asked this question for this series: “Why are there wars, genocide, and suffering?” You know why there are wars – people have been fighting over land and valuable resources from the beginning of time. As soon as someone wants something that somebody else has, a war is started. As soon as someone wants something that we have, a war is continued as we defend ourselves. It’s self-preservation.

We have warring spirits. We fight and argue to prove that we’re right, that we hold the power, and we’re going to do whatever it takes – lie, cheat, steal, or kill – to prove that we’re #1. If we’re fighting to prove we’re #1, we’re not focused on God. We’re focused on ourselves. We have caused suffering to ourselves and others, often innocent people. Most large-scale suffering, like genocide, is the product of systemic sin. The ‘isms run deep in our societal structure and cause human suffering.

We as individuals and as a society are too focused on ourselves. When we covet another's land or resources, we are sinning, which breaks God's heart. We all know this, right? I think the real question that was asked was "Why does God allow wars, genocide and suffering?" If God is all-powerful and loving, then why does God allow pain and suffering? It boils down to your view of God.

Do you view God as a puppet master and we're the marionettes? God controls our every move at his whim. Or, do you believe that God put the world into motion and then backed away, leaving us to figure out our own mess? Or, do you believe that God created the world and us with the ability to change, so we become co-creators with God to make the world more like God intends? I believe that God is still here with us, and we have the freedom to choose what kind of world we want to live in.

This leads us to question why did God give us the freedom to choose in the first place? Was that a mistake? God is not a tyrant nor a dictator. God gave us free will because God is good and loving. God sees our potential to choose God's way and is rooting for us. Of course, God knew that we would choose to turn away from God at times, but God saw the greater good of giving us the choice and the power to make things right for ourselves and the world. God knew that when we choose to walk humbly with God, that we would do justice and love kindness.

So, when we choose to walk with God and follow God's requirements, what does that really mean? God wants us to "do justice" (v.8). We often think justice is

punishment, but God doesn't punish when he brings justice. God rights a wrong, but it's in the form of being an advocate for the outsider, giving the voiceless a voice, protecting unprotected people like widows, orphans, minorities, foreigners, the poor, elderly, and disabled. Doing justice means standing up for anyone who is treated less than God's child.

God also wants us to "love kindness" (v.8). What does it mean to love kindness? Other translations say "love mercy," "love goodness," "embrace faithful love," and "be compassionate and loyal in your love". "The Hebrew word *hesed* means God's loving-kindness. We respond to God's love by sharing it with others."¹ It's not a religious ritual done out of obligation. It's changing our hearts to love like God loves.

And, God wants us to "walk humbly" (v.8) with our creator. When we walk humbly with God, we don't focus on ourselves. We focus on God, and what God calls us to do with our lives and how to live our lives. We are listening for God's voice and seeking to grow our faith. We align our lives to God's intention for the world. We conquer our warring spirit and choose to live our lives in goodness. Out of the three, this is the most important one because when we walk humbly with God, we learn and understand who God is and how to do justice and love kindness.

God's lovingkindness is best seen in Jesus who gave up some of his power to become human. He loved us so much that he joined us in our pain and suffering. And, he suffered. He came to save us by becoming one of us, and we killed him. But while on earth, he lived out this prophesy

¹ Brett Younger, *Feasting on the Word*, location 9962.

from Micah. He was the ultimate social justice advocate, he loved everyone and showed us how to love, and he walked with God the Father, all the way to the cross. Even though that was part of God's plan of salvation, I know it broke God's heart. I'm sure many tears were shed.

You can choose today and every day how you are going to live. Will you choose to live in goodness, humility, and love, the way God intended? Will you do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God? Or, will you turn your back on God's requirements and continue living a life focused on pride and self-preservation? One, helps to create a world that God intended, and the other, causes pain and suffering. Which will you choose?