



Roanoke, Virginia

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“He Has Told You, O Mortal...”

Micah 6:1-8

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Before we hear today’s scripture, there’s one small Hebrew word worth listening for—a word that quickly becomes a favorite for many seminary students because it shows up everywhere, and it’s rather fun to say.

It’s the word *chesed*.

It’s often translated as kindness, mercy, or steadfast love, but none of these English translations quite capture it. *Chesed* is love that shows up and stays. Love that keeps faith over time.

As we listen to Micah today, it shows up in v8. Listen for that deeper current beneath the call to justice and humility—this invitation to live lives shaped by *chesed*, God’s enduring, loving-kindness.

Micah 6:1-8. Hear what the Lord says:

Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.

²Hear, you mountains, the case of the Lord,
and you enduring foundations of the earth,
for the Lord has a case against his people,
and he will contend with Israel.

³“O my people, what have I done to you?

In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

⁴For I brought you up from the land of Egypt



and redeemed you from the house of slavery,
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.

⁵ O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.”

⁶ “With what shall I come before the Lord
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
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 has told you, O mortal, what is good,
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice and to love kindness
and to walk humbly with your God?

I grew up in the foothills of South Carolina. From my parents’ backyard, on a clear day, you can see Table Rock Mountain. I used to walk home from school with my friends and look for the view of the mountain breaking through the trees from the sidewalk.

From our front yard in Roanoke, we can see 12 O’clock Knob Mountain. It’s been covered in ice and snow all week, and it’s the distant backdrop for many a family snow day photo.

I love that even though I have moved away from home, I’m still living at the foot of the same ancient mountain range.

Geologists tell us that the Appalachian Mountains are around 480 million years old, with parts formed over a billion years ago. They are among the oldest mountain ranges on earth, older than trees, land animals, and even the Atlantic Ocean itself. Once as tall as the Himalayas, they were formed by massive tectonic collisions and then shaped, over unimaginable time, not by sudden collapse, but by patient erosion—wind, water, ice, and time.

What we see now is not evidence of weakness, but endurance. The Blue Ridge has survived upheaval, pressure and long seasons of being worn down. Yet, they still remain. They carry memory in their very bones.

So, when the prophet Micah summons the “enduring foundations of the earth” to listen, he is calling on witnesses like these mountains, who have seen empires rise and fall, communities’ fracture and reform, injustice repeat itself, and mercy return again and again. These mountains remember what God has done, even when the people who walk among them forget.



Perhaps that's why Micah calls on them to listen—because *they* know that real change is slow, that faithfulness is formed over time, and that what endures is not spectacle or beauty, but steadfast love.

Our passage begins in a surprising way. God doesn't open with a command or a threat. God opens with a question. "O my people," says God, "What have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me."

This is not the voice of a distant judge. As scholar Terence Fretheim notes, this is relational language.¹ It's the sound of relationship under strain. God is saying, "Tell me what's going on between us." God doesn't shut the conversation down. God invites it.

That alone is worth sitting with for a moment. Many of us have learned, in one way or another, that questioning God is dangerous, that doubt is somehow disloyal, or that complaint equals faithlessness. But here, God welcomes honest speech. God welcomes questions.

This is the same God who listened to Abraham argue about Sodom, and who heard Moses push back in the wilderness. This is the same God who would rather hear the truth of our weariness than receive our polite silence.

Instead of punishment, God responds with memory. "I brought you up out of Egypt. I redeemed you from slavery. I gave you leaders—Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. I protected you when you were vulnerable. I brought you home."

Micah tells us that the purpose of this remembering is that we may "know the saving acts of the Lord." Not that we just recall them, but that we *know* them and let them shape who we are.

As Gregory Cuellar reminds us in his commentary, memory here is not nostalgia; it is resistance.² Forgetting liberation stories makes oppression easier to repeat. Forgetting what God has done makes injustice feel normal. God tells this story not to shame the people, but to re-form them. To remind them who they are.

And still, the people respond with anxiety. "With what shall I come before the Lord? How much is enough? What do I have to do to make this right? Burnt offerings? Costly calves? Thousands of rams? Rivers of oil?" And finally, the question turns desperate, "Would my firstborn do?"

Beneath these questions is fear—the fear that God's love is fragile, that love must be earned, that if we give enough, sacrifice enough, suffer enough, then maybe God will be satisfied.

Micah exposes the lie at the center of that fear. This is transactional faith. This is not what God wants.

"He has told you, o mortal, what is good." This is not new information. There is no hidden requirement, no spiritual loophole. "He has told you."



This is not how you earn salvation. Micah is talking to a people who already belong to God. This is not a ladder to climb ... it is a way to walk.

In the Hebrew tradition, *chesed*, loving-kindness, is not one virtue among many. It is the foundation of the world itself. *Chesed*, loving-kindness, is what God does. *Chesed* is what endures forever.

Like these mountains, *chesed* moves slowly. It is shaped under pressure. It survives upheaval. It is often invisible in the moment, but it lasts.

The prophet Micah looks from the mountains, to the history of a people, to the inner life of the human heart, and says, “Look for loving-kindness. It runs through all of it.”

We live in a season of violence and division on nearly every headline. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of hate and injustice around us. Micah’s text calls us not to turn away from the pain, and not to miss the mercy that shows up right beside it. *Chesed*, loving-kindness, is found in the moment when someone chooses life over fear, care over indifference, and compassion over passivity. It shows up in small, faithful acts that rarely make the headlines but that quietly hold the world together.

We don’t need new mountains. We don’t need louder faith or bigger sacrifices. We need justice that is practiced faithfully. We need kindness that endures pressure. We need humility that keeps on walking, step by step, side by side, with a God who has already told us what is good – a God who invites us again and again to choose steadfast, loving-kindness. “He has told you, o mortal, what is good.” This is what the Lord requires of you.

ⁱ Terence E. Fretheim, “Commentary on Micah 6:1-8,” WorkingPreacher.org, for Feb 2, 2014, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-micah-61-8-3>.

ⁱⁱ Gregory L. Cuellar, “Commentary on Micah 6:1-8,” WorkingPreacher.org, for Feb 2, 2026, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-micah-61-8-6>.

