

Eunice Poethig Meditation

Micah 6:1-8/Judges 5:1-7

Let us pray: In the midst of so much else, carve out *your* space, O God. Bring this word of yours alive, that we might glean from it some words of wisdom as we celebrate our dear friend Eunice this day. Amen.

Kerry, Dick and I came up with the Micah text quickly when we thought about today's service. It would be so simple to make a connection we reasoned. And it would have to be a text from the Hebrew Scriptures. The second one I added after reading Eunice's dissertation. How could we not include a Victory Song on this day, really?

Prophets come in all shapes and sizes in our ancient holy texts. Some shout, some cajole, some deride, some coax. Part politician, part religious professional, some are self-appointed, others seem to arise by default, but all have one end-game in sight: to speak to their *particular* people in light of their *particular* situation....some word that comes from God. The word of the Lord was rare in those days, we read in 1 Samuel. Don't we know *that* feeling. A prophetic voice is the voice that keeps us grounded, that makes us non-anxious when everything and every one around us suggests that chaos is the only way to go. The word of the Lord is rare in our days, and the prophetic voices are few and far between, it seems. Ever so timely then, to turn back to the prophets of old, to see if their ideas and words can stretch across time and speak new.

We love Micah 6 for a number of reasons, but one of the best is that it is short and sweet and to the point. IT fits on a banner, in a song, a t-shirt, in our memory bank. It pops up out of nowhere, just when we have ourselves tangled up in complicated theologies and dead-end religious arguments. You think God wants all that from you? Hrumph. No. Do justice.

Love kindness. Walk humbly with God. Get that right, the rest will all fall into place. Not suggesting that Micah wasn't a heavy hitter. He was caught between a north/south struggle that feels all too familiar these days. Some in his country were all about David. Others were all about Moses. Micah was all about justice. He called out to his people to get back on the justice wagon before it was too late, and Assyria came to punish them. All the religious ideas and worship practices in the world didn't mean much as long as shepherds and farmers were being exploited by the rich. It's not about what you offer, it is about how you treat people, he preaches. Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly. Do that. That is what will please God.

The song of Deborah in the 5th chapter of Judges is one of our oldest ever texts.

Included in the collection of Victory Songs that Eunice's dissertation examines, three broad strokes came from my reading of her work published for Union Seminary in 1985. She, Eunice, is making the case for women's leadership through the practice of singing these songs...all kinds of references in them implied and documented---women had a role....though unrecognized largely by subsequent patriarchal scholarship. The evidence is there. But rarely makes it in the lectionary. Second, she is making the case that these texts were the major carriers of the revolutionary nature of belief in Yahweh---justice, like Micah, is seeping through each line of songs, and the consistent message of Yahweh is there from the oldest get-go.....if your earthly rulers are not interested in the plight of the poor, they are not being faithful. This is our unique, ancient heritage to claim. Third, she is making the case for the power of song to carry people through most anything. The songs become the vehicle for women's voices, and the message of justice, and the message survives all kinds of editorial and redactive activity----

because it is such a powerful medium. Read Deborah's song. And the dissertation. You won't go away unfed.

To be here today means you really don't need me to connect the dots here. To know Eunice, her legacy as a scholar, a leader of her denomination, a publisher, a genealogist, an extraordinary mother and wife and friend, means you know how these texts are going to tie with this one extraordinary life. Prophet, she was. All in for justice. She was. Kind. Absolutely. Humble. Always. Micah 6: check.

A prophet who loved music? Yes. We are singing 10 hymns today. That's after we pared the list down considerably. She had a lot of "favorite" hymns we discovered. She was singing hymns long after her other faculties had given up the ghost. But she loved a lot of stuff. She loved color. Walk into any space she ever had any say over. It was on fire with color. She loved music and she loved good scholarship, and she loved the idea of a community of faith that tended to both those. She loved God, if you are going to stay around for the video, you are going to see the best ever clip of her talking about the fact that we really don't need a category called evil. Oh my. So agree with her on that front. She loved a good theological conversation. She loved to be outdoors and she loved to travel and she loved to think about her heritage and geneology. And, let's get real here, she loved her family. I almost lost myself in tears when I read the acknowledgement page of her dissertation. Oh she mentioned all the normal folks like teachers and mentors, but she went on at length giving credit to this great piece of writing and research to her husband and each of her 5 children. Each had contributed in a certain way, each specifically named for the way they helped...even then 4 year old Erika. Really. She was

the most prophetic creator of family. And she did it in the most feminist way of anyone I know in her generation. Unapologetically she loved her family and knowledge and career and did it all.

Deborah's song begins: *When locks are long in Israel, when the people offer themselves willingly---bless the Lord.* If ever a person offered herself willingly to God, Eunice Blanchard Poethig did. And the collision was powerful, poignant, full of promise and beautifully melodic---.

To be a teacher of song is such a gift and such a privilege. Music sears our soul, it sticks inside like superglue and will not be sloughed off in the viscera of life and death. Eunice was a teacher of song. In all the areas of her life. And as we sing and re-sing those songs, our communion with Eunice is solid and lasting. This is what resurrection looks like. A life that cannot possibly be snuffed out just because the body has come to an end.

Margaret's audio reflections are such a wonderful reflection on their family life together. What a powerful family tradition. For all the reasons we've just named. I think the same things extends to we, the people of God, for our time. For those of us who come together each Sunday or Saturday or however your tradition requires, one of the unique features of our life together is that we sing. Outsiders find that odd, I'm guessing. Where else do we sing together? Oh there is a national anthem here or there, but even that is fraught these days with social commentary and mixed message. For the most part, unless we are at an Indigo Girls concert, we don't sing together, with words we all know, to tunes we find

pleasing, for the purpose of offering ourselves up to the power of community and the presence of our God.

We give thanks on this day, that through lives like Eunice Blanchard Poethig, we learn a bit about song, a bit about our faith, a bit about the power of love and family and justice, and the whole of our own lives are better for it. We are better for having sung with Eunice. And Eunice will sing with us still. Of that fact we are sure. Thanks be to God. For sending us prophets. For teaching us how to sing. For giving us extraordinary humans like Eunice to lead us on our way. Amen.