

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
November 27, 2011**

“Mighty Messages from Micah”

Micah 2:12,13

Mighty Messages from Micah: GATHER!

The Advent King:

- 1. Assembles the ranks***
- 2. Breaks through the opposition***
- 3. Leads on at the head***

Hymns: *Come, Lord Jesus* – 1 – 11 – 2

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Micah 2:12,13 –

¹² ***“I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people.***

¹³ ***One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the LORD at their head.”***

As we begin our Advent series today called ***“Mighty Messages from Micah,”*** I’d like you to open up your pew Bible to the book of Micah.

We’re doing this for a couple reasons today. One is that we’re going to be reading some of the verses that precede our sermon text. Another reason is that I’m not sure how familiar you are with the book of Micah, and it’s good to see this prophecy in the place where God chose it to be placed in the Old Testament. Sometimes these books that are called “minor prophets” are not so familiar to even the most regular Bible reader. Those twelve books we call “minor prophets” are not called minor because their

message is unimportant. They’re called minor because the length of their books can be quite short. Therefore, they have a tendency to “hide” in the pages of your Bible and never be found!

We’re going to start reading in Micah 1 this morning, to set the scene for our sermon text in chapter 2. Some background information on Micah in general would be helpful here. Micah began his ministry in approximately 740 B.C. Do you remember what momentous, terrible events loomed in the near future for God’s Old Testament people at that time? The nation of Israel had had a sad history in their recent past by the time Micah served as a prophet. After King Solomon’s reign they had been split by a civil war into the kingdoms of the North and the South. After multiple wicked kings arose and led God’s people astray after other gods, the Lord had become fed up. Also, the nation at that time was prosperous, but it was idolatrous and immoral. Their kings also were making treaties with the heathen nations around them for back-up, something that God detested and had forbidden. Therefore, God decreed that both kingdoms would be overrun by enemy forces and would be carried off into exile.

For the Northern Kingdom of Israel, this exile would take place in 722 B.C. by Assyria, twenty years after Micah began his ministry. The Southern Kingdom of Judah would last longer, but would be carried off by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Therefore, Micah had many strong words of law and warning to say to God’s people in his day.

As we read the words of Micah 1 and 2 today, we will see an interesting pattern that repeats itself five times in this short book. This is something you should remember in your mind’s “file” whenever

you think of the book of Micah. The pattern begins with many words of strong LAW from Micah. Verse after verse condemns what was happening in the country and warns that God's judgment is coming. Then suddenly, a short burst of GOSPEL comes out of the prophet's mouth.

Some of you might remember the famous story from past generations of "*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*." It relates the story of a respectable, well-mannered doctor by day (Dr. Jekyll) who transforms into a remorseless criminal at night (Mr. Hyde). The same individual exhibits two extremely different personalities. The book of Micah seems to have a "Jekyll and Hyde" personality, with the strong words of law and then beautiful words of gospel. I think a good illustration of this would be a parent who has had to discipline his children many times in the course of "one of those days," but after the kids are in bed still has a wish on his heart that he can bless instead of curse. How mom or dad wishes they could say more uplifting words to them than scolding them all the time.

With that background, let's read parts of the first oracle from Micah 1 and 2:

The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah—the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it, that the Sovereign LORD may witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.

Look! The LORD is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the earth. The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope. All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel... I will make Samaria a heap of

rubble, a place for planting vineyards... All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used.

Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl. For her wound is incurable; it has come to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself...

Shave your heads in mourning for the children in whom you delight; make yourselves as bald as the vulture, for they will go from you into exile. Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it...

I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves. You will no longer walk proudly, for it will be a time of calamity. In that day men will ridicule you...

You drive the women of my people from their pleasant homes. You take away my blessing from their children forever. Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy...

I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the LORD at their head."

1 — The last paragraph of those words are our sermon text today. We will learn three things about the Advent King who comes to gather his people. The first lesson for us is in verse 12: "*I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together*

the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people.”

As you could tell from the longer section we read, God was indeed going to exile his people. What would the effect of this scattering have on the nation? It would devastate them. Their cities would be torched. Many of them would die. Others would be carried off hundreds of miles from their homeland and scattered over much of the world they knew at that time.

Yet what does God’s heart say as he pronounces this chastisement on his people? *“I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen.”* **God promises that his people will not stay in exile, for he would assemble their ranks again. In fact, he says that their “sheep pen” would be thronging with people and excitement over this.**

What does this first lesson mean for us this Advent? **Christ the Advent King assembles his people!** When exactly would this prophecy of Micah come true? It would not come true in Old Testament times, for the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom would never return from their exile. This is not a promise of “Zionism,” a false hope that there will be a mass conversion of the Jewish nation to Christianity in the end times, and that the nation of Israel will enjoy political prominence in the world again, for only a remnant will return. This identity of this thronging remnant is revealed in Galatians 3:29, which says, *“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

The ultimate fulfillment of this assembling is in the Messianic era when God

would assemble his New Testament Church. Although the people of Micah’s day had forsaken the Lord, he would not forsake them, but would assemble them in later times.

How grateful we are to hear this, for we must admit that we have been a “scattered” people by nature as well. Isaiah 53 says, *“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”* How have you been “scattered?” What forbidden paths have you wandered down? Where have you gone in your sinful past, requiring the Lord to have to “assemble” you back to himself?

How glad we are to hear these words, which sound much like the New Testament words about the Good Shepherd! Micah tells us that God assembles us as a thronging, excited people of God.

What a welcome thing this is for our generation today. I don’t know how much you read from sociologists or people who follow the trends, but many say that we are living in a fragmented generation. Even though communication is as fast as it’s ever been, many feel like they don’t belong. Mobility takes us far from our familiar places rather quickly. People are wary of commitment and feel lonely and isolated. What welcome news that God has a thronging, exciting place for you to be!

2 — We learn a second lesson in the **“Mighty Message from Micah”** today. We read in verse 13, *“One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out.”*

This is one of the more unique pictures of Christ that we see in the Old Testament. The picture is that he has assembled the flock

together, and now they are enclosed and hemmed in. They are trapped, in a sense.

Then one of their own who “goes up before them” changes things. We could call him a “battering ram” from among them. This ram arises and breaks open a way out of the enclosure. The older King James Version even calls this ram literally “the breaker.” The word used for “break out” here is an extremely vivid word. It’s a word fitting for a disaster situation or for a military action. It’s a violent word. And here it’s the Christ, the Advent King of the flock. After he breaks through the wall, the sheep stream out after him. They are free!

What does this picture mean for us? What has enclosed and threatened us? A hymn that we sing at Lent has some good thoughts along these lines:

**Enslaved by sin and bound in chains,
Beneath its dreadful tyrant sway,
And doomed to everlasting pains,
We wretched, guilty captives lay. (102:1)**

By nature we were born slaves. We were chained to our sin and guilt. We were not free creatures. Psalm 51 tells us, “*Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*” What has enslaved you?

- What sin has been an especially bad trap for you?
- What influence of the devil have you profoundly felt and have found no escape from?
- What addiction has tormented you?
- What sinful habit has oppressed you?

Thank the Lord he has sent our Advent King as the “breaker!” 1 Corinthians

15, an Easter section of Scripture, says, “*The saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Christ our “breaker” has destroyed sin, death, and the devil by his life, death and resurrection! He has paid our price of sin and a “prison break” has occurred! We have streamed out of the dangers of hell because of what our Advent King has done. How fitting it is that one of our Easter hymns, “Awake My Heart with Gladness,” says:

**He rends Death’s iron chain,
He breaks through sin and pain,
He shatters hell’s dark thrall,
I follow Him through all. (156:4)**

3 — One more lesson is ours to learn from Micah 2 today. Our text closes by saying, “*Their king will pass through before them, the LORD at their head.*” **The picture at the end of this dramatic scene is one where the sheep that have flowed out of their confinements are led by the King, the Lord himself. He continues to be with them and be their Leader!**

How comforting! He is not absent from them. He does not break them out and then leave them to find their own way. He personally leads them.

This is reminiscent of how God “broke them out” from Egypt. After the dramatic scene at the Red Sea where God parted the waters and caused them to walk through on dry ground, do you remember how he led his people in the wilderness? Exodus tells us it was with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. What

optimism this should have given them as the Lord visibly guided through that wilderness!

Moses realized how important it was for God to be with them and be their leader at that time. After the children of Israel sinned by making the image of the golden calf, God in his anger said this in Exodus 33: *“I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites... But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.”* When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn... Moses said to the LORD, *“You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me... If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.”* The LORD replied, *“My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”* Then Moses said to him, *“If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here... And the LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked.”*

Is this important to you? I think many days we don't think about God's presence and protection going with us in all we do because he is such a constant. Can you imagine the fear you would feel if God said to you one morning, “Today I'm a bit busy to lead you through this day. You're on your own for a day.” You would be a slave to fear, fear of the future, fear of uncertainty, fear of the spiritual and physical enemies out there.

A pastor once related a time when this text really hit home. He remembered a time when he was camping and he was with a small group of boys that were trying to get back to the lodge. It was night and it was raining. They had one older boy with them, but they were really struggling to find their

way, since their flashlight had gone out. They were falling over trees and branches continually. They reached a spot that was obviously a ridge, and they could see in the distance across there were lights gleaming – it was the lodge! But there was a space of darkness in front of them. They couldn't tell if it was three feet deep or thirty feet, or three hundred feet. What he did know is that he was not going to go down there!

They all stood there and ended up looking at the older boy. He said, “OK...” and slipped down over the edge. They could hear him sliding for a while and then there was silence. They waited a while, which seemed endless. And then came the voice of the older boy. He said, “It's OK! You can make it! Come on across.” So one by one they slid down in the ravine – pitch black – and followed him to the other side.

Jesus leads us on through this life with his own presence, for he says, *“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* He says, “It's OK – You can make it. Follow me!” And we have the assuring comfort of his promise to be with us.

As we close our look at this first **“Mighty Message from Micah,”** we realize that we have seen comforting things. **The promised Advent King will GATHER:**

- 1. He assembles the ranks of God's people**
- 2. He breaks through the opposition**
- 3. He leads on at the head**

May this message of the Lord comfort us as we begin the Advent season. And may God bless us as we hear more **“Mighty Messages from Micah!”** Amen.