

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
December 18, 2011**

*Micah 5:2-5a*

**“How Do You Measure God’s Love?”**

**Hymns: *Come, Lord Jesus* – 702  
Distribution – 53 – 32  
Closing - 21**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans of  
Judah, out of you will come for me  
one who will be ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from of old,  
from ancient times.”*

*Therefore Israel will be abandoned  
until the time when she who is in labor gives  
birth and the rest of his brothers return  
to join the Israelites.*

*He will stand and shepherd his flock  
in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty  
of the name of the LORD his God.  
And they will live securely, for then his  
greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.  
And he will be their peace.*

*When the Assyrian invades our land  
and marches through our fortresses,  
we will raise against him seven shepherds,  
even eight leaders of men. Micah 5:2-5a*

If you had the opportunity to be with us last week, you might recall that our message from Micah looked at the threats to God’s plans that occur when people view

themselves as “too small,” when Christians fail to see themselves as integral parts of God’s salvation work. Today, Micah gives an answer to another doubt that people often hold; the doubt that God is “too small” to do anything in the world. Specifically, today we want to answer the doubt that God’s love is not capable of accomplishing what Christians often hope and say that it will. And so from that premise, the logical question we need to answer this morning is this, “How do you go about measuring God’s love?”

To ask that question is certainly logical. After all, we have numerous ways in which we measure things in this world. We step on scales to measure our weight. We have gauges to measure pressure. We have all sorts of kitchen utensils to measure out ingredients. And we take these measurements and take note of them so that we can grasp what we have in front of us and so that we can know the possibilities of what we have. I measure my weight to keep a grasp on my health. A builder will measure a project to know that he is on track. A doctor will measure medicines to keep people healthy and alive.

The apostle Paul speaks to that very reason that we measure things in his words from Ephesians 3:17-18. In those verses Paul calls us to measure God’s love so that we can **“grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of God.”** Paul wants us to grasp exactly what is there in front of us when it comes to God’s love. He wants us to know exactly how “big” God’s love is. He calls us to measure God’s love so we can know and share all that God’s love truly is.

And the reason that Paul has to call us to measure God’s love is because, sadly, we often forget exactly what God’s love is capable of. We often forget what God’s love is capable of because we have a tendency to confuse God’s love with human love. That confusion is certainly logical because we are

around human love all the time. And from that experience, we often see the negative sides of love. We often find that human love is shallow. We see often that it is volatile. We see often that it is selfish. Human love often fails and brings immense amounts of pain into people's lives. And while it is sad, the truth is that for many, many people, human love is not reliable. And because this is the kind of love that we are around and which we often experience, this imperfect human love becomes our main perception of love in general.

For that reason, people of this world, you and I included, naturally question and doubt God's love. We are by nature skeptics. So when sadness or hardship or pain or disaster come into our lives, our natural inclination is to doubt God's love. We wonder if it is really as advertised. Is it really capable of everything that he says it is in his Word? How many of you have not questioned God's love as you've dealt with problems in life?

And while it is very understandable that, because of our experiences, we confuse what God's love truly is, it certainly does not make it right to question God or his love. So, for that reason, there is a very important purpose in measuring God's love. We measure God's love to know exactly what that love is capable of. We need to be reminded that God's love is not like human love. We need to be reminded that this love that God has for his people and for his world is like nothing else.

So, there is great logic and purpose in setting out to measure God's love, but our question has yet to be answered. It is still there, "How do you measure God's love?"

Though that might seem a difficult question, the prophet Micah says there is an answer; there is a way to measure God's love. In these verses from Micah, the prophet speaks about a ruler. He says, "**But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are**

***small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel.***" Micah there says we have a ruler. Of course, he is not speaking of a ruler in the inches and feet type, but in the sense of one is a king and has authority. This ruler that Micah speaks about would come and lead his people, the people of Israel.

However, through this great Ruler prophesied about in Micah, we can also go about measuring God's love. Through this ruler, we can measure the depth of God's love. Through this ruler, we can measure the strength of God's love. Through this ruler, we can measure the width of God's love. And through this ruler, we can measure the endurance, the lasting-power, of God's love.

If you knew any of the words of Micah before we started this Advent series, they were probably the words of our text this morning. They are words of prophecy which speak with amazing detail. Seven hundred years before Christ came, Micah foretold specifically where the Anointed One of God would be born. The birthplace of this ruler would be in a small town just south of Jerusalem which we still sing about all these years later, *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. But even though this ruler's earthly life would start in that small town known as the "City of David," this was certainly not the beginning of this Ruler. Micah tells us that this Ruler's "***origins are from of old, from ancient times.***"

Sometimes as you hear people talk about their spouses, you hear these words, "I loved her from the moment I laid eyes on her." When it comes to God, the fire of his love has truly been burning since the beginning. And as we look at this Ruler, we see the depth of God's love in the plan that brought this Savior into the world. God's plan of love was in place before the creation of the world. Long before you were born, God loved you. He had a plan for you. He longed to redeem you from the curse of sin

and undo the problems caused by your sin. This plan of love endured over all the years through all the ugliness of a sinful and corrupt world. And God's love carried the plan all the way to that manger in Bethlehem. There, when the time had fully come, Jesus was placed; the God-man about whom Paul would say, "***He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.***" (Colossians 1:17) As we look back at the plan, you cannot help but see the great depth of God's love as it was carried through the years.

But that love that had its start in the beginning of time would mean nothing if it did not have strength to help and rescue and accomplish what was planned. As Micah continues in his words of prophecy, he tells us that yes, this ruler would accomplish the plan completely; and by him we can measure the strength of God's love. Micah says in verse 4, "***He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD and in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.***"

In all honesty, as you look at a baby in a lowly manger, it would be hard to think power and strength. The Christ child certainly came in a humble way. But make no mistake, he came in the strength of the LORD and in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. All the power of the Almighty, everlasting God was in this child. And combined with the purpose and strong desire with which he came, this Ruler would stand, always ready and alert to act and to battle for his people.

And standing ever-ready, this ruler would act. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus said in John 15, "***Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.***" Jesus would show the strength of God's love as he willingly gave his life on the cross. Though his body up on that cross would certainly look like defeat to many, this act was the strength of God's love at its

greatest point. Through this ruler born in Bethlehem, we find that the love of God is strong enough to take away sin; it is strong enough to crush the devil; it is strong enough to put an end to death. Through the strength of God's love, the victory is won.

And who is this victory for? Micah shows that once again God's love can be measured by the Ruler. At the end of verse four, Micah says this, "***His greatness will reach the ends of the earth.***" How wide is the love of God? It stretches as far as Christ's victory. And when Christ died on that cross, he paid for sins once for all. The sins of the world were done away with. God's love stretches to encompass all people. It is a love that he wants all people to hear about and to have and to enjoy.

With all the measure of what God's love is laid out before us, I would consider it essential that we need to know that this love of God will endure. As you look out into the world, it becomes very obvious that the red hot glow of new love often fades and sometimes even dies out completely. Love does not always last. So, how do we measure the lasting-power of God's love? Not surprisingly, Micah points us one last time to the Ruler. Micah says in verse 4 and 5, "***They (his people) will live securely and he will be their peace.***" Those are future absolutes. The people of God WILL live securely. He WILL be their peace. Literally, it says that they will sit. Under the lasting protection of God's love, a time is coming when we will no longer have to stand guard because there will be no threats. We will have no enemies because of God's love. The peace that defines this ruler is the great word, Shalom. It is a word that encompasses all of God's salvation, describing the deliverance from danger, the security which we have and the eternal prosperity which results from being in Christ's kingdom. This shalom is ours forever because God's love

lasts forever; it endures as Christ's rule endures.

All that we have heard about today, this is God's love. It is measured through the Ruler that was born in Bethlehem and who would go to Jerusalem to reign on the cross. Through that Savior, we see the full measure of God's love. We see the depth, the strength, the width, and the lasting power of God's incredible, one-of-a-kind love. As Christmas approaches so quickly now, may the Apostle Paul's prayer be ours, "Lord, allow us to grasp the greatness of the love that we have been rooted in, all because of your incredible grace. Amen.