

February 1, 2026

With What Shall I Come Before the Lord?

Psalm 15:1-2, Micah 6:6,8, 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

As I was reading today's Micah passage, I thought of the Little Drummer Boy – who had nothing to present to Christ, but what God had given him ... his musical talents. And I thought about what God has given me, given you. I thought about how we have enlarged those gifts, how we've practiced and improved on the seeds that we were given. I thought about how we have taken these gifts and tried to better the lives of those around us ... Or how we have failed.

The Micah passage, once again, finds the Israelites failing. They were going through the motions of their so-called faith, but they had abandoned the heart of their covenant with God – their partnership with God.

God wanted to be in relationship with His chosen people, but the Israelites keep turning their back on Him. So Micah speaks for God and asks, *“O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer Me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of slavery,”* I gave you Moses and Aaron and Miriam ... but still you turn away from Me!

The Israelites don't deny all that God has done for them; how God has saved them; how God has shown love to them; how evident God's goodness has been. But instead of showing their gratitude, the Israelites start feeling guilty.

They ask, *“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?”* The first time I read that I imagined myself asking that question, I heard the Little Drummer Boy asking that question ... and I heard a pleading of a grateful heart, not knowing what to do with the little the Israelites had to show their immense gratitude to God. *“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?”*

To paraphrase, though, the Israelites sound more like this... “Ok, God – what do I owe You? Can I pay You off with some burnt offerings? Maybe a calf or two? Or do You want me to give You thousands of rams and ten thousands of rivers of oil to please You? Oh, I've got it now ... I'll give You my firstborn so You'll forgive me!”

Micah knows God enough to know what God actually requires, so he says to the Israelites, *“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?”* People! You've heard what God has said before. If you truly love God, if you truly want to be in relationship with God ... going through the motions of religious sacrifice isn't the answer.

You have to love God's people. You have to share what you have so that no one goes hungry, no one is ignored, no one is sleeping in the cold, no one feels rejected. That's justice.

You have to show compassion, gentleness and faithfulness ... you have to be kind to those around you.

And you have to walk humbly with God – today we have the perfect example, living simply like Jesus did, rather than living like the world. God wants us to live in joyous relationship with Him – but neither the Israelites, nor we can do that from a place of guilt. Justice, kindness, humility, joy – they come from a place of gratitude.

David understood. In Psalm 15 he says, *“O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right.”*

The Old Testament tells us to leave behind lies, leave behind deceit, leave behind slander, leave behind hate ... and choose to live in gratitude.

God has given us so much. Every talent is from God; our time and our treasures are from God; and we are to be thankful, grateful – and give back to God what He has given us!

As God gives to us financially, gives to us skills and resources - we are to give back. We can give through missions – which help those in need; through support of our community leaders – who will hopefully improve our community; through support of our church – giving of our time, of our talents and of our finances; through support of our church leaders – letting them know that we are grateful for their time and service and we are ready to help in all ways we can; through protecting our environment – protecting our water, our land, the animals, our children and our children's

children; by speaking up for justice for everyone – letting our voices be heard; by being good stewards of God’s Word – sharing God’s saving grace with everyone.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 says, “*the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*”

We are to willingly, prayerfully, cheerfully give to God as an act of worship and an act of gratitude!

Sometimes I walk around our church and look at things that are out of place or dusty; I see a water stain, artificial tree needles, a full trash can.

Today’s sermon gave me an eye opener. How dare I leave to someone else the care of God’s sanctuary?! I’ve walked past a poinsettia leaf that I could easily pick up. Why didn’t I stop? I see a water stain on the wall ... why haven’t I taken a paper towel and wiped it down?

This is God’s sanctuary. I should care for this place of worship as if it’s the most important thing to do.

So today I challenge all of you to pick up that crumb, straighten up that pew, sweep under the seats, dust the table, empty a garbage, show God your love in simple actions.

I challenge you to pray for our community and its leaders – in the hopes that little by little our world will change.

I challenge you to drop a nickel or a dime or a dollar in the Community Missions jar; a jar of peanut butter or box of pasta in the basket for Heart, Love and Soul; a blanket or two for the Gospel Rescue Mission; to give just a little more in the offering so that we can thrive and be more able to help where we can. Without supporting missions and this church, it will be harder to share God’s love and joy with the world.

On January 20, 1961, President John F Kennedy said these things in his inaugural speech:

“The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life...

“We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans--born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage--and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

“Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

“To those peoples in the huts and villages across the globe, struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required – not because the Communists may be doing it, not because we seek their vote, but because it is right.

“If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich. ...

“Let all our neighbors know that we shall join with them to oppose aggression or subversion... (and he said much more)

“All this will not be finished in the first 100 days. Nor will it be finished in the first 1,000 days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin. ...

“Now the trumpet summons us again – not to bear arms ... not as a call to battle ... but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle ... (and here Kennedy quotes from the Bible – Romans 12:12) “*rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation*” – a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself. ...”

And then those famous words, “And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country. ...”

Finishing with “With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking HIS blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.”

To paraphrase ...

“And so, my fellow Christians: ask not what God can do for you – ask what you can do for God!”

Christian stewardship is not about guilt, it's not about settling some debt we think we owe to God. Stewardship is about gratitude; it about living a transformed life because of all God has done for us. When we live in gratitude, we cannot help but to show justice, kindness, humility and generosity.

The Little Drummer Boy, although a fictional character, mirrored the shepherds who simply gave their presence and the praise. The Drummer Boy teaches us to humbly give from what we are given, to give from the heart.

As President Kennedy said, "Let us begin."