

**Dig Deep**  
**Dr. Patricia L. Hunter**  
**September 20, 2020**



Thank you, Athena, Eric, and David.

I lay before God's throne of grace, my heart, my life, my all. Indeed, that is all we have that we can offer our God in gratitude for God's lovingkindness and tender mercies. Amen.

Now listen to our scripture as written by the prophet Micah 6:6-8

*"With what shall I come before the LORD,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before God with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
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?"  
God 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?"*

The word of God for the people of God, thanks be to God.

Before I get started with today's message, I would like to wish our Jewish friends and siblings a holy and prosperous Rosh Hashanah.

The last time I preached from this text at SFBC was a week after the Trump inauguration. That was a hard and painful season for many of us. It's been almost four years and while preparing this message I asked myself, what has changed? How have our lives improved? How has the planet gotten relief from obsessive warming, human arrogance, and corporate greed? How have we rallied as human beings to care for one another and support justice wherever injustice reigned? What is the state of racial equality in our congregation and in our country? Have we gotten better at securing housing for all and making sure all go to bed with satisfied bellies? Are more of our children being taught in ways that support their learning style? And finally, do we as a congregation embody our values to do justice, love mercy, work for peace, and walk humbly with God.

All hard questions. I would be curious to hear your responses to some of them. A few things have changed for the better, but the responses I came up with mostly made me sad. Yet, I am hopeful, knowing we love God and the Holy One calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

This fall we will look at our Affirmation of Values that we adopted as a congregation in 2017. We will explore them in light of the racial unrest, social tension, and political upheaval we find ourselves in today. This week, we will look at our first value,

**We will go deeper in faith** as we do justice, love mercy, work for peace and walk humbly with God.

We will go deeper in faith. We will go deeper in faith. To be honest with you that is as far as I got with this first value this week. What this value says to me is that as we do the work of the church, as we do the work of peace, as we do the work of justice, our faith in God, and in one another *will* deepen. We will be stronger witnesses to the goodness of God, and stronger in our belief that God can do anything but fail. When we go deep, we will share our testimony of God's grace and mercy with the world. We will go deeper in our faith as we collectively work in community.

Now, this COVID pandemic has forced many of us *individually* to dig deep into our faith. We're tapping into our faith not so much as a way to do justice, but as a way of survival. The fear of getting the corona and dying has had some of us calling on Jesus in all new ways! Amen somebody! The isolation of being stuck at home (if we are so blessed to have a home), is real. I and many others in our congregation are struggling being separated from parents, children, and grandchildren. All this is heart wrenching. The struggle with depression and our addictions has been relentless during this time of major change. Yes, many of us are digging deep personally just to stay afloat. But our congregational value is calling us to dig deep collectively as a community of faith.

The 8th century BCE prophet Micah understood the need to go deep when all around him was falling apart. Micah was concerned about ordinary folks, not the aristocracy, but concerned about those struggling to make ends meet. He felt compassion for the poor and held leaders responsible for the suffering of the marginalized. Micah thought it wrong that the rich, the powerful, and business owners used their influence to exploit the vulnerable. Micah thought it wrong that influential leaders created great inequalities of wealth. We would call it the wealth gap.

Micah even chastised prophets who were coopted with money and prestige to serve the elite. Religious leaders turned from their origins of loving God and loving the people to exploiting the least among them. Micah thought it wrong that the poor were asked to give up more and more to prop up the military so monarchs could bargain with other empires for equal standing.

Micah sided with the vulnerable and Micah is a prophet who can speak to us today. The existential question that Micah heard from his people who felt constantly under siege was, what does God want from us? Micah told them, to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

Well, we have a similar question. And, once we ask the question, God what do you want? We have to listen for the answer. For many of us, listening is not what we do well. We like to talk a lot. We talk a good game, but listening um....not so much. We are not very good at listening

because to really listen means to open our ears and our hearts to another. If we really listen, we have to focus on someone else—someone other than ourselves.

In other words, we have to be vulnerable in order to listen. Healing justice practitioner and Black activist, Prentis Hemphill said real listening requires vulnerability. Many of us resist being vulnerable at all costs. But if we are going to go deeper in our faith, we have to learn how to listen and be vulnerable with God and one another. God, what do you want from us?

Earlier in the service Rev. Harriet mentioned the work of our Long Range Planning team. The team listened for hours to members of SFBC as we spoke of our hopes and dreams for our future. And, we continue to listen to one another as we make plans to serve our expanded community over the next 5, 10, 20 years. **Listen**. In all that we do, we must be Spirit led as we look to the future. We will go deeper in faith by listening to one another and listening for direction from the Spirit.

In this season of racial unrest, racial inequality, and white supremacy, it is really hard for white people to **listen** to the pain of BIPOC. One of the proposals of the LRP team is that we strive to be an anti-racist faith community. No one wants to be called racist, but Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, author of *How to be an Anti-racist* said, if you are not actively doing anti-racist work you are a racist.

Colin Kaepernick took a knee at the playing of the national anthem in 2016. Few **listened** then to why he took a knee. He took a knee to call attention to the killing of black and brown people by law enforcement. He also wanted to call attention to the racist policies and practices in this country. Coaches, owners, and others including the president, wouldn't listen to the real reasons, but made up their own reasons why Kaepernick took a knee. They said he was being un-American. He was being disrespectful to the flag. Many said, he was an embarrassment to the NFL.

Finally, after dozens more black and brown men and women were murdered by law enforcement including George Floyd, Breona Taylor, Ahmaud Aubrey, and locally Charleena Lyles, Che Taylor and John T. Williams just to name a few, finally some white folks including many at SFBC started to really **listen** to what BIPOC people were saying about racism in America.

We will go deeper in faith as we listen to the voices that we systemically silenced, in order to keep our privileges and positions.

The survival of the planet and our humanity is at stake. We must dig deep and listen well. Recently, my spouse and I had a new rock wall built at our home. It is beautiful. Once it was finished all we needed was a few plants to really make the wall pop. So we went to a wonderful nursery and found several low maintenance plants and I planted them in the relatively sandy, rocky soil. Well, after two weeks the plants started to die. Not because of lack of water, or sun, or nutrients, but because I had not dug deep enough. My spouse Renee pulled them all out, replanted them all, used more potting soil and dug deeper than I had. Now, the plants are thriving.

If we as a faith community want to thrive for generations to come and not just survive for a few more years, we must dig deep. How that will unfold waits to be seen. But we must listen for the revelation of God's spirit and not be content to do as we've always done or to do that which is expedient/ easiest, or to listen only to those with the loudest voices.

What does the Lord require of us? Of course, to do justice, love mercy, work for peace and walk humbly with God. But only by digging deep, by opening our hearts, and listening for God, will we know how that will unfold in this season.

There is so much healing that needs to be done in our society. We are our sisters' keeper, our brothers' keeper, and our siblings' keeper. We can work toward healing and wholeness as we listen to one another's stories. On the road to Emmaus, after the resurrection, a couple of disciples were walking home distraught because of what had taken place in Jerusalem. Jesus came beside them, walked with them and listened to their pain. We don't have to be the hero in other's people's stories. We just have to listen to their stories and believe them.

My friends, as we move into this time of deep discernment and stepping out in faith, we have to go deeper in faith. We have to take ourselves out of the center of every conversation, stop talking, and listen. When we listen with open hearts and open minds we will hear from heaven. And it will be clear, what the Lord requires of us. My sisters and brothers go deep! And all the people of God said, Amen.