I. Quiz Time

Today is a pretty big day if you’re a fan of the Seattle Seahawks; and alas, I am. It’s been a family thing since the team’s existed. In fact, my parents were there at a landmark game—November 4, 1979—when the Los Angeles Rams put up 475 yards of offense and held the Seahawks to...-7 yards total offense. Negative seven. It was so bad that, during the second half, a rather inebriated fan stood up and shouted out something that has epitomized Seattle sports for decades.

He shouted, “Do something—even if it’s wrong!”

In our Old Testament lesson, that’s exactly how the Israelites are operating. They’re going to do something, even if it’s wrong. With that, it’s quiz time.

Question #1: Put yourself in the shoes of Adam and Eve—in the Garden of Eden, before the fall into sin. Here’s the question: what do you have to do to get on the Lord’s good side?

Answer: nothing. You’re already on the Lord’s good side. He just created you and put you in Paradise. What would make you think that God doesn’t love and favor you? So what do you do? Do what God has put you there to do. Love your spouse, take care of the garden, be fruitful and multiply, and eat from every tree but one. Do what Garden-of-Eden people do. In other words, live as one loved by God, with no fear of His wrath. Don’t worry about God’s love: He already loves you. The only way to mess this up is to eat the fruit from that one tree. So don’t do that.

Question #2: You’re part of Noah’s family. The ark is built, the flood has covered the earth, and you’re bobbing up and down on the waves. Here’s the question: what do you do now to make God love you?

Answer: nothing. God already loves you. He’s already got you on the boat. He’s saved your life—do you need more proof of His love? So what do you do? Easy: don’t jump off the boat. Stay where you are, safe and dry. Take care of the family and the animals. Do what “ark people” do. In other words, live as one loved by God. The only way to mess this up is to reject God’s gifts of life and safety, and to throw yourself overboard into the dark waters.

I had more to the quiz,¹ but Lisette has done a fantastic job of teaching us the truth of

¹ One more. Question #3: You’re among the people of Israel leaving Egypt at the start of the Exodus. God has parted the Red Sea, with walls of water standing at attention on both sides of a dry path through. The walls are just about to collapse and drown a bunch of Egyptian soldiers. How do you make sure that you don’t drown too?

Answer: don’t run back into the sea. If you’re an Israelite, it means that you’re already on the other side on dry land. So what do you do? You keep following the Lord as He leads you to the Promised Land. He’s going to rain bread from heaven and make sure your clothes don’t wear out all the way. So follow Him, help your neighbors around you, and
this sermon already. Back to her in a little bit.

You don’t have to earn God’s love. God already loves you. Live as one loved. See, if you spend your life acting as if you have to earn God’s love, then you’re claiming that God doesn’t already love you. You’re saying His gifts of life and favor aren’t free: you’re accusing Him of being less than gracious, poking Him the eye. Don’t do that. Live as one loved by God.

If you don’t, you can mess things up really bad. Off to Micah 6 we go.

There, the Lord calls upon His people to plead their case. He calls out, “O My people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer Me!”

The people of Israel don’t believe God loves them. Because they don’t believe God loves them, they are acting as if He didn’t; which means either they’re rebelling against him, or trying to earn His love—which denies His grace and love.

But why? Why do they doubt? What has God done to them? How has He wearied them? Look at the evidence in the text, for God gives them a list of what He’s already done for them. “I brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery. I gave you Moses, Aaron and Miriam to lead you. When Balak the king of Moab sent Balaam the prophet to curse you and destroy you, I used his mouth to bless you and deliver you. When you crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land between Shittim and Gilgal, I parted the river—just like the Red Sea—to give you the land.”

And after all this, the people of Israel don’t believe God loves them. Why?

Sin. You were expecting something else? There are the everyday sins of lust and covetousness, the temptations to immorality and theft and a lack of love toward one’s neighbor. When these sins grow among His people, the Lord disciplines them. Under discipline, many respond just like angry kids to their parents: “Obviously, God, You don’t love me because You don’t let me do what I want!” To which the Lord could respond, “Really—I don’t love you? Remember the Exodus, deliverance in the wilderness, the gift of the Promised Land? Really? I don’t love you?”

But the people of Micah’s time are convinced that God doesn’t love them, so they try to figure out what to do. Some think idolatry is the answer. The thought is probably something like this: “Maybe God is angry with us because we’ve been worshiping Him wrong. Maybe if we call Him Baal or Ashteroth or a golden calf, then He’ll love us.” For others, the answer is different and more like those in our text. They reason, “Rightly or wrongly, God is angry with me. What do I have to do to make it up to Him so that He loves me again? What if I offer more sacrifices to Him? What if I offer more yearling calves and thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of oil—is that enough for God to love me? This God sure is tough to please: what do I have to do?!“

You know the answer: nothing. God already loves you. The reason He disciplines His people when they sin is because they’re killing themselves. Turning from God’s Word to willful sin and idolatry is like eating the wrong fruit in the Garden of Eden, or jumping off the ark to drown.

God already loves His people. That’s why Micah is there: God is still sending prophets to warn the people to repent of their sin, to remember His love. If He didn’t love them, He wouldn’t make His Word known to them anymore. He’d just forsake them and go.

look forward to your new home. Do what God’s chosen people do. In other words, live as one loved by God. The only way to mess this up is to convince yourself that God doesn’t love you, and that you should look out for yourself.
All that said, the people of Micah’s time are asking, “What do I have to do?” And it culminates in our text with this stick-it-to-God kind of question: “Would God be happy if I sacrificed my firstborn son for my sin? Would that do it?”

The answer of all of Scripture is astonishing: no. No, God will not love you if you go so far as to sacrifice your firstborn son to make up for your sin. Instead, God declares He already loves you so much that He sacrifices His only-begotten Son to atone for your sin. The cross still lies in the future at the time of Micah, but Jesus will die for their sins too—God has made that love and promise known ever since Adam and Eve first brought sin and death into the world.

So what are the people of Israel to do? They are to live as those loved. They are to stop accusing God of being unloving, and instead rejoice that He loves them. They are to turn from the sins that are killing them. Rather than worry of God’s wrath, they’re to care for those around them. They’re to be kind to those in need. And when they sin, they’re to confess their sin humbly, and to rejoice in God’s forgiveness.

Or, as our text puts it: “He has told you, O man, 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.”

II. Already Loved
Dear friends, I bid you the same: live as one loved by God.

You live in a world that is dominated by fear of God, by the conviction that God doesn’t love. Whether they know it or not, most people live their lives knowing that they’re sinful and dying. They may not be able to articulate it, but they sense God’s wrath for sin, and they’re afraid. Afraid, maybe angry at God. Either way, they do not believe that God loves them.

This is how so many so misunderstand the Church. They believe that the message of Christianity is, “As long as you quit your sin and do everything God’s way, then God might love you enough to save you.” That’s certainly not the Gospel. The truth is that God already loves you so much that He’s already given His only-begotten Son to die for your sin. He purposed to do so before the foundation of the world, whether you would believe in Him and be saved or not. He calls for you to turn from sin because your sin is killing you. He’s given His Son to die that death on the cross so that you might live instead.

It’s still a challenge for you as a Christian. You’ll still believe that, even though you’re saved by grace, you stay on God’s good side by the good works that you do. You’ll still think that God loves you more when you don’t sin and less when you do. You still think you have to prove yourself to God by standing against sin on your own strength, rather than confess your weakness and rely on Christ’s strength instead. When some trial grinds on, you’ll wonder if God still loves you or not.

(And when you read through the beatitudes of the Gospel lesson, you’re still tempted to think, “As long as I do these things, then God will bless me.” But Jesus is describing the people of God, and He’s saying, “You are blessed. Yes, you, now, because God already loves you.”)

This is what Lisette has taught us by being baptized and doing nothing. Today she has forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. Today she is already set free to live as one loved. She is not condemned to a life of trying to earn God’s favor by doing something, even if it’s wrong.

Dear people of God, live as one already loved by God. You’ll be tempted every day from within and without to believe that God’s love for you is an iffy thing, based upon what you do.
Such a temptation is designed to make you doubt God’s love and thus turn to sin. But you know better: God already loves you. He’s already given His Son to atone for your sins by His death on the cross, and there is no greater love than that. That’s why you’re set free from doubting God’s love. That’s how you’re set free to live as one loved. You do justice and love kindness: rather than a life of selfishness and sin, you live like the people of God live, caring for those around you. And you walk humbly with your God: you confess your sin, acknowledge His love and rejoice in His forgiveness for you.

Live as one loved by God, because you are—so much so that you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen