Our Old Testament reading begins in a metaphoric courtroom and it is God who is making the case that God’s people are not centered on God’s calling. This is one of the many places in scripture where, in order to call people back into right relationship with God, a prophet first reminds us of God’s faithfulness through remembrances of God. We too are surrounded by God’s stories here in the sanctuary so I thought we might begin with a short tour.

Dick Crone taught me everything I know about this sanctuary. The last time the two of us did a tour together he gifted me with this flashlight. It reminds me of a lightsaber and so between us I think of Dick as Obi Wan.

I’m going to start up in the rafters where there is a beautiful carving along the top of the ceiling and repeating shields an anchor and a cross. The House of Hope got its name from the journal of a Dutch sea captain who described a fort of that name as a place of safety and welcome. This is meant to be a true sanctuary.

Just below the carving are the corbels. The corbels tell the story of Paul. Starting in the back and coming forward, there are eight different scenes depicting Paul’s life. If you climb to the balcony, you can see the first corbel at eye level; it depicts Paul and another student with Gamaliel.

The stained glass windows on the pulpit side tell stories from the Old Testament starting in the back with Abraham and coming forward to Moses, David, and then John the Baptist. John is a pivotal figure between the Old and New Testaments, he is dressed like Elijah, in the role of a prophet, but also a contemporary of Jesus.

Then the windows on the other side of the nave tell the story of Jesus beginning in the back with the Nativity window and coming forward to the Healing window, the Teaching window and the Transfiguration.

There are four figures on the lectern and each has a book. Inside each book is a carved symbol: a man which is a symbol of for the Gospel of Matthew, the lion for Mark, an ox for Luke, and the eagle for John. These symbols go back to Saint Jerome in the 1st century and you can find them in churches all over the world.

As you come from the lectern up into the chancel you pass under the Great Arch; this is nearly fifty feet of carved limestone based on Jesus’ words, “I am the vine and you are the branches.”

Then here in the chancel, we have this special yellow and blue tile. All of the tile in the sanctuary came from the Pewabic Tile Company in Detroit. Mary Chase Stratton was the designer for our project. She wanted to include something of Minnesota and so these yellow tiles were made with clay sent to Detroit from Red Wing. This beautiful design is often covered by our communion table, but I pushed it back today and invite you to step up into the chancel to look at it to see the many beautiful symbols that surround a piece of scripture. The words here are from today’s Old Testament reading in the King James version, “What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justice, to love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.”

This is an old space and every time we walk into this sanctuary we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, meaning centuries of connection with cathedrals in Europe as well as decades of connection with people who lived and worshipped here. We are surrounded by centuries and millennia through the stories of God and God’s people.

The anchor is a long cherished Christian symbol but also comes to us because of that Dutch sea captain, it represents safety and welcome–and along with the cross, we have hospitality and redemption at the roofline; and then the life of Paul is holding up those amazing beams. The words from the rafters are: “Nothing can separate you from the love of God.”

The windows echo words like “Let my people go!”

“ . . . surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the Lord’s house my whole life long.”

Up here in the front, “You brood of vipers.”

The teaching window depicts Jesus giving the Sermon on the Mount.

And here at the Transfiguration window, God says to us all: “This is my Son the Beloved, listen to him.”

Today’s readings, taken together, reflect an age-old struggle to go all in with God. For centuries, we’ve left that kind of devotion to the monastics, now, if we are to take the leap of faith that is required for the future expansion and growth of Jesus’ message, the summons is to integrate the monastic or what’s known as the mystical wing of our tradition, into our daily lives.

What if each one of us gave full focus and devotion to the partial verse at the center of the chancel? In the words of one commentator:

Theologically, justice is identified with the nature of God (Isaiah 30:18) and is an activity of God (Genesis 18:25; Psalm 9:4). Justice is a transformative virtue that seeks to establish or restore community, while aiming to balance personal good with the common good. Three types of justice include (1) commutative justice, which focuses on relationships between members of the community; (2) distributive justice, which functions to ensure the equitable distribution of goods, benefits, and burdens of a community; And (3) social justice which affects the social order necessary for distributive justice. To love kindness involves both affection and ethical love of neighbor and fidelity to covenant law. To walk humbly with God implies an attitude of reverence and openness, coupled with a sense of personal integrity, candor, and honesty. God's people are called to godliness and to live out their faithfulness of justice and love.

The sermon title comes from the late senator John Lewis who said, "Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and help redeem the soul of America." It is the true word that reiterates Micah as well as Peterson’s translation of Jesus’ words:

“. . . —count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens. . . . And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.”

God, Jesus and our scriptures are focused on the well-being of community, so God in the courtroom is meant to sting us. If we are to trust the assurances of the prophets when they promise us goodness and hope, we must not only endure but embrace that which feels like a gut punch to the conscience or a wound to the heart or psyche. We are connected to God by what we believe but even more so by what we do. This is hard for the human family because it involves a constant shift in focus from self to neighbor. Jesuit Philip Berrigan described the human response to this call by saying, “The poor tell us who we are. The prophets tell us who we can be. So we hide the poor and kill the prophets.”

As if in answer to Berrigan, Lewis expressed this hope, "Nothing can stop the power of a committed and determined people to make a difference in our society. Why? Because human beings are the most dynamic link to the divine on this planet."

These are the crossroads at which we stand: to silence the prophets or to go all in with God. Because now, with the release of the brutal bodycam video this weekend, we must say his name: Tyre Nichols. The Black community has established a rhythm of response that we heard with the death of George Floyd–“Justice would be George alive.” “Justice would be Tyre alive”–there is still the process of legal action and recompense, but justice is making it stop. For too long, there has been too much violence and some bear more of the burden of violence. This is why we have a sign out front that says “Black lives matter to God and to us.” It is the time to work through our communal sins and the processes of healing the anger and divisions of our past so we might gain that sense of wholeness and potential of which Lewis speaks.

Human history and biblical history show that love of power and fear are in a constant competition with our ability to be free and live in peace. Eventually we realize this contest or rivalry or battle is a set-up; but Jesus taught: “For freedom I have set you free,” a just freedom; and “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you;” a just peace. It asks us to learn to live with humility and the discomfort as God’s work for justice because that is the “transformative virtue” that “restores community.”

So Micah’s courtroom drama calls us to a deeper practice of Jesus’ ways of loving. Walter Brueggemann wrote, “Compassion constitutes a radical form of criticism, for it announces that the hurt is to be taken seriously, that the hurt is not to be accepted as normal and natural, but is an abnormal and unacceptable condition for humanness.” The past few years have given us glimpses of a judgmental future with no grace; this is not the Way of The Christ.

House of Hope is not just a place we come to worship, it is a place we absorb, it gets into our blood and our bones. Jesus did not send people to find some other refuge in their struggles, rather, he, himself, was a Sanctuary in human form. You and I are invited to do the same. It is surely uncomfortable at times, but it is only in a healed unity that we can move forward.

For various reasons, in recent history, the phrase, “The future is female,” emerged.

And I say Yes! More importantly, the future is BIPOC. (Black, Indigenous, People of Color). And the future is Gay. The future is Trans. And yes, the future is male. The future is multireligious and leaning into the mystical. As Heather McGhee put it so well, the future is *The Sum of Us*.

We must do our work for the healing of others. We will be uncomfortable. With God’s help and determined perseverance to stay with the healing, our children and grandchildren will have a world more like this sanctuary and more like kin-dom of God. May it be so. Amen.