



## **ECUMENICAL DAY OF WORSHIP (DIFFERENT FAITH COMMUNITIES WORSHIPPING TOGETHER)**

### **LECTIONARY COMMENTARY**

**Sunday, August 30, 2009**

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**Lection - Micah 4:1-4** (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 1) In the days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, (v. 2) and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion

shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (v. 3) He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; (v. 4) but they shall sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

## **I. Description of the Liturgical Moment**

Ecumenism (ecumenical) is based on the Greek word “oikoumenē” from its Greek root *oikos* meaning both “house” and “world.” The meaning of this word in the African American faith tradition is “a great gathering of the community at-large for one cause.” It is not uncommon for African American churches of various denominations and even different faith communities to worship together especially if particular themes are lifted or certain holidays are being celebrated.

Ecumenical worship services help us discover the universal nature of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. They also assist in opening our eyes to a broader view of what the Divine means to another faith tradition and/or denomination. In essence, ecumenical worship fosters an engagement between us and persons with whom we would not normally associate due to theological and cultural differences. Ultimately, such services can prepare people of faith to be unified, and to face our idiosyncrasies and the barriers that divide us. By coming together, congregations and groups can witness distinct differences and experiences that add multiple layers and textures to worship.

There are ecumenical worship services held throughout the United States, particularly during Holy Week services, Good Friday services, World Day of Prayer and World AIDS Day. (For more information on such services please consult [www.worldaidscampaign.org/en/Key-events/World-AIDS-Day/2008/Ecumenical-Worship-Service](http://www.worldaidscampaign.org/en/Key-events/World-AIDS-Day/2008/Ecumenical-Worship-Service) and The National Day of Prayer Service at [www.ndptf.org](http://www.ndptf.org).)

## **II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Micah 4:1-4**

### **Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. often quoted former Yale Divinity School Dean Liston Pope who said, “It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o’clock on Sunday morning.”<sup>1</sup> Even as I am writing this commentary, I cannot help but think just how separate we still are forty years after the death of Dr. King when it comes to worship in America. I do understand that a lot of this is due to sectarian beliefs and the separation of the races, but when I read Micah 4:1-4, it becomes apparent that this is not what the One who created all of us intended. I believe that if we can stand in line together to wait for the latest iPhone or iPod, certainly we can worship together and put aside our denominational, cultural and ethnic differences.

Micah 4:1 tells us that God's house on the mountain is exalted above the hills. The hills represent differences and dogma, but the mountain only takes into account the escalation to the divine. I am a Baptist pastor, and I have had many opportunities to worship with people from other denominations. As I recall, there were more similarities than differences.

## **Part Two: Biblical Commentary**

The Prophet Micah's career spanned a quarter of the eighth century BCE. Micah prophesied during the reigns of three Judahite kings: Jotham (742-735), Ahaz (735-715), and Hezekiah (715-687 BCE). Micah was concerned with the ethical issues that faced Judah. He declared that the sins of Judah would lead to punishment with God using the Assyrians as the instrument of judgment. Micah delivers a scathing oracle to Jerusalem in Micah chapter 3:9-12. In his oracle, he focuses on the crimes of the corrupt officials, both political and religious, whom Micah attacks because they have exploited the people. The priest, prophets and judges were found to be self-serving and corrupt in all their ways.

In contrast to the bitter oracle against Jerusalem, Micah, in chapter 4:1-4, lifts the major theological theme of peace in this text. This passage examines four critical areas of peace that are essential in light of the foretold judgment. In verse one, there is universal peace from God, and in verse two there is the peace through fellowship and relational power. In verse three, there is peace that comes through transition and transformation, and in verse four there is peace that comes as a result of safety and security. Although the word peace is not stated specifically in the passage, it is easily inferred due to the transitional expressions of the text, that move the people to gather under the direction of the Creator to experience what cannot be manifested without the presence, power and promises of the Creator.

In verse one, universal peace is heard in the descriptive language of God's house residing on the highest mountain raised above the hills. The prophet with poetic license paints an image of lofty heights and tranquil calm that is above the noise of the present condition of Judah's transgressions. In addition to the defining imagery, there is the universal centrality of God's peace. Notice the hills pale in comparison to the mountain of the Lord's house. God's house is lifted as a central location in the world for all to recognize. The word "mountain" in Hebrew (*har*) is used symbolically to indicate a great world power. The word "hill" in Hebrew (*gib'ah*) is used to indicate a smaller world power. This means that the kingdom of the Creator of the Universe is more powerful than any other kingdom in the world. Thus, when we come together to worship this Creator it lifts our minds and hearts above the mundane focuses of our small world-views.

In verse two, peace is experienced through fellowship and intentional relational power. The nations come to a central place to fellowship. This is reminiscent of the gathering of the people as they go back to Jerusalem for the celebration of High Holy Days. Three times a year, people from all regions would make a pilgrimage back to the Holy City of Jerusalem for the major feast days of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (or Sukkot).

Today, churches in many different states organize collaborative worship services around themes that unite them. Micah describes a need for the people to prepare to come again in the future and

gather together not only to celebrate but to become empowered through instruction. The reason why Judah became so corrupt and self-serving was because they forgot to walk in ways of God. God's peace will be universal in its influence, but there must be a flow or movement of the people to come together in fellowship so that they are empowered. The psalmist said it best, "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!"(Psalm 133:1).

In verse three, there is evidence of peace through transition and transformation. The transition is due to the declarative words of God, "He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away...." This statement is for those nations who find it difficult to transition and give peace a chance. God informs them that there is no need for warfare. As we consider the importance of ecumenical worship, we must approach worship committed to peace. When this happens, the term warfare transitions and is transformed to welfare—the welfare of the world—the same world about which God is so concerned. Although God is involved as the arbitrator of peace, the transformation comes through the action of changing weapons into positive working tools (swords become plowshares). It takes an open heart to change, and it takes an open mind to act on the change. The end result of the text tells us that this is possible, but the reality is that we still have difficulty transitioning, transforming and changing ammunition that divides so that we can build alliances that unite us.

In verse four, the text shows that peace comes through the assurance of safety and security. Through God's declaration of peace, the nations and their callous cruel intentions of the past are disarmed. This verse tells us that there is now nothing to fear. There is nothing to fear when it comes to worshipping with people of various denominations and faith traditions. The text also speaks of vines and fig trees under which people can sit. When relationships with persons from different denominations and faith communities are nurtured and attended to as a good botanist would attend to vines and figs these relationships will produce something so wonderful and powerful that we can all be covered by it and fellowship one with another under it.

## **Celebration**

This passage gives us hope for lasting peace and security to come. We can celebrate now in preparation for that day. We can come together now and worship despite our differences. So let the Pentecostal worship in peace with the Methodist, and let the Episcopalian worship in peace with the Baptist. Let the Jew worship in peace with the Muslim, and let the Protestant worship in peace with the Catholic. Let all denominations and faith communities come together and worship under the umbrella of divine peace.

## **Descriptive Details**

The descriptive details of this passage include:

**Sounds:** The nations speaking (v.2); hammering of plowshares into pruning hooks (v.3); the voice of the Lord of Host (v.4);

**Sights:** The mountain and the hills (v.1); the streams of people (v.1); swords turned into plowshares and spears turned into pruning hooks (v.3); vines and fig trees (v.4);

**Smells:** Mountain air and dusty roads (v.1); heated metals (v.3); the odor of vines and fig trees (v.4); and

**Textures:** Jagged and rocky mountain peaks (v. 1); and cold, sharp metal tools (v. 3).

### **III. Recommendations for Clergy**

- Read about the Three Models of Ecumenical Worship in the Marquand Reader at Yale Divinity School 2007 at [www.yale.edu/ism/marquand/documents/091707MarquandReader.pdf](http://www.yale.edu/ism/marquand/documents/091707MarquandReader.pdf).
- Join or get more information from your local Council of Churches and the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance or Fellowship in your area.
- Please download the “Sample 11 Days Plan for an Ecumenical Celebration.” It contains numerous ideas on planning an ecumenical service.

#### **Note**

1. Marty, Martin E. Modern American Religion. Vol. 3 Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996. p. 388.

## Sample 11 Days Plan for an Ecumenical Celebration



So you want to plan your own 11-Day celebration? Below is a list of activities from 2008 you might consider participating in and/or planning for your own church community. This is NOT meant to communicate that all activities should be done, but rather you can pick any of the bulleted items under each day to create your own plan.

Not every event listed has resources on [www.11daysofunity.com](http://www.11daysofunity.com). The items in **BOLD BLUE** are available for download at [www.11daysofunity.com/resources](http://www.11daysofunity.com/resources). We have provided this list to help support you in being creative in your own community. While the possibilities are endless, we hope this helps jumpstart your involvement. Read carefully through each day, as some items are duplicated on multiple days to show a variety of options when you plan an event. This list is NOT exhaustive by any means!

At the end of this list are more ideas for your church. Start planning now! Get connected with the wider community through an interfaith council, other churches, and secular peace organizations. Finally, let us know if we can be of help in any way. Thank you for getting involved... in creating a world that works for everyone.

### Sunday – September 7, 2008

- Sunday Service: Peace Theme
- Youth Education: **11 Days Curriculum** at Youth and Family Ministry section online, it contains 3 Sunday lessons, starting the Sunday before World Day of Prayer. Also online are the activities that are described in the curriculum document.
- Play “**Fine Line**” song by Richard Mekdeci, in Multimedia section of resources.
- Make Prayer/Peace Flags to hang outside at church for the coming week through the 11 days.

### Thursday – September 11, 2008 - World Day of Prayer, Celebrating Oneness, Healing the World

- 24-hour prayer vigil, in concert with Unity Village prayer vigil.
- Listen to **WDOP 2007 – Interfaith Prayers** from Multimedia section of resources.
- Have congregation join at church to watch live streaming of Gregg Braden, keynote speaker for WDOP
- Play **Fine Line** song by Richard Mekdeci, in Multimedia section of resources.
- Begin 11 days of peace prayers, use the brochure online Print section of resources of **11 Days of Peace Prayers**. Use at church each day, with staff, volunteers, etc. and/or encourage people use it at home every day. Begin with Unity prayer in brochure.
- Ask participants to hand out **11 Day Peace Cards** “Make Peace Your Business.” Encourage community, staff, volunteers, etc. to use at church and affirm each day, and/or at home with families and friends. Use the affirmation cards for longer than the 11 days.
- Begin book study of *The Intention Experiment* by Lynne McTaggart. Download from Print Materials section of Resource page **11 Days Power of Prayer** to create your own intention “experiment” at your church or for yourself.

### Friday – September 12, 2008

- Continue 24-hour prayer vigil, in concert with Unity Village prayer vigil
- Continue with Day 2 prayers from the [11 Days of Peace Prayers Brochure](#)
- Nonviolent Communication Workshop ([www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org))
- Play [Fine Line](#) song by Richard Mekdeci, in Multimedia section of resources.

### Saturday – September 13, 2008

- Play [Fine Line](#) song by Richard Mekdeci, in Multimedia section of resources.
- [Awakening the Dreamer](#) Symposium, watch the [video](#) in the Multimedia section on the Resource page. Contact Pachamama Alliance ([www.pachama.org](http://www.pachama.org)) to set up a presentation (you will want to advertise this symposium far ahead of time in order for people to plan to attend).
- Continue with Day 3 prayers from the [11 Days of Peace Prayers Brochure](#)
- Nonviolent Communication Workshop
- Greening Your Church workshop
- Earthdance, for more information visit [www.earthdance.org](http://www.earthdance.org).

### Sunday – September 14, 2008

- Sunday Service: Peace Theme
- Youth Education: [11 Days Curriculum](#) at Youth and Family Ministry section online, it contains 3 Sunday lessons, starting the Sunday before World Day of Prayer. Also online are the activities that are described in the curriculum document.
- Play [Fine Line](#) song by Richard Mekdeci, in Multimedia section of resources.
- Nonviolent Communication Workshop
- Invite a local Interfaith group or people from various religious traditions, see Multimedia resources: [11 Days Web Links Doc](#). Also see [11 Day Interfaith Celebration](#) under Print Materials section of resources online.
- Make Prayer/Peace Flags to hang outside at church for the coming week.
- Continue with Day 4 prayers from the [11 Days of Peace Prayers Brochure](#)

### Monday – September 15, 2008

- 11am prayer service, in concert with Silent Unity 11am service.
- Continue with Day 5 prayers from the [11 Days of Peace Prayers Brochure](#)
- Begin series of classes:
  1. Small Group Peace Book Study
  2. Peace Film Series with discussions
  3. Exploration of World Religions

### Tuesday – September 16, 2008

- 11am prayer service, in concert with Silent Unity 11am service.
- Continue with Day 6 prayers from the [11 Days of Peace Prayers Brochure](#)
- Continue series of classes that started on Monday.
- Diversity Celebration: Break into small groups and tell a short history of your family's diversity in dyads. Then share in small groups then in large group. May share ethnic food, music, dance, dress.

### Wednesday – September 17, 2008

- 11am prayer service, in concert with Silent Unity 11am service.
- Invite a local Interfaith group or people from various religious traditions, see Multimedia resources: [11 Days Web Links Doc](#).
- Create a mid-week Interfaith Worship Service, see [11 Day Interfaith Celebration](#) under Print Materials section of the resources online.
- Continue with Day 7 prayers from the [11 Days of Peace Prayers Brochure](#)
- Continue series of classes that started on Monday.

### Thursday – September 18, 2008

- 11am prayer service, in concert with Silent Unity 11am service.
- Continue with Day 8 prayers from the [11 Days of Peace Prayers Brochure](#)
- Continue series of classes that started on Monday.

#### Friday – September 19, 2008

- Continue with Day 9 prayers from the [11 Days of Peace Prayers Brochure](#)
- Continue series of classes that started on Monday.
- Nonviolent Communication Workshop
- Greening Your Church workshop
- With Interfaith or Ecumenical Partners:
  - Create an 11-Day Peace Film Festival, or show one transformational film this evening
  - Carry out a Spiritual Social Action activity
  - Gather for a “Peace Music Concert.”

#### Saturday – September 20, 2008

- Continue with Day 10 prayers from the 11 Days of Peace Prayers Brochure
- [Awakening the Dreamer](#) Symposium, watch the [video](#) in the Multimedia section on the Resource page. Contact Pachamama Alliance ([www.pachama.org](http://www.pachama.org)) to set up a presentation (you will want to advertise this symposium far ahead of time in order for people to plan to attend).
- With Interfaith or Ecumenical Partners:
  - Create an 11-Day Peace Film Festival, or show one transformational film this evening
  - Carry out a Spiritual Social Action activity
  - Gather for a “Peace Music Concert.”
- Create an Abraham Walk, visit [www.agnt.org](http://www.agnt.org), for more information.

#### Sunday – September 21, 2008

- Sunday Service: Peace Theme
- Youth Education: [11 Days Curriculum](#) at Youth and Family Ministry section online, it contains 3 Sunday lessons, starting the Sunday before World Day of Prayer. Also online are the activities that are described in the curriculum document.
- Play [Fine Line](#) song by Richard Mekdeci, in Multimedia section of resources.
- Nonviolent Communication Workshop
- Invite a local Interfaith group or people from various religious traditions, see Multimedia resources: [11 Days Web Links Doc](#).
- Make Prayer/Peace Flags to commemorate International Day of Peace.
- Continue with Day 11 prayers from the [11 Days of Peace Prayers Brochure](#)

#### **Ask a local non-Christian group if your congregation could attend a service or prayer time with them or invite them to share about their religion with you**

- It is the Islamic Holy Month of Ramadan so they may invite you to celebrate prayers and breaking of the fast with them some evening.
- You might want to experience a Jewish Sabbath Service on Friday Evening.
- Check with local Hindu, Buddhist, CaoDai, Baha’i, Sikh, etc. communities for ways to interact.

**Connect with your local Christian community to plan joint “Peace” events:** Mennonites, Quakers, Church of the Brethren, Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Congregational, United Church of Christ, Lutherans and Disciples of Christ Churches, Religious Science, Divine Science and Catholic Pax Christi leaders.

Read through the [11 Days Secular](#) from the Resource page, Print Materials section online, it gives wonderful ideas of how to connect with the larger secular community to plan events throughout the 11 days.

Invite your local **Neighborhood Watch Group or Neighbors** to a **Neighborhood and Pet Blessing** some Saturday or to an **Ice Cream Social** to build peaceful relationships.



**Present your City Council with a Proclamation to sign for “11 Days of Global Unity: A Season of Interfaith Celebration.”** Download the [Declaration of Interdependence](#) from the Print Materials section.

Promote involvement of government agencies and private companies in focusing on **peace in various ways in their workplaces** through the connections in your congregation.

Read through the [11 Days Interfaith Possibilities](#) from the Resource section online, it gives wonderful ideas of how to connect with the larger community to plan interfaith events throughout the 11 days.

Distribute [11 Day Peace Cards](#) throughout your city.

Promote **Peace Creative Expression** through music, art, skits throughout your city, include youth organizations.

Promote **Community-wide Diversity Celebrations** such as cultural fairs with food, costumes, music, dance and stories or parades with flags from many countries and prayers for each country as recommended by the United Nations. See [Declaration of Interdependence](#) in Print Materials section.

See [11 Days Press Release Doc](#) in Print Materials section to help promote the events you plan.