

10-11 #13

God Is _____ & We Are _____

Psalm 119:33-40

1 Cor 3:10-11, 16-23

Matthew 5:38-48

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: **You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy¹.** 9When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; **you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God².** 11You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. **12And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord³.** 13You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. 14You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; **you shall fear your God: I am the Lord⁴.** 15You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. **16You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord⁵.** 17You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; **you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself.** **18You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord⁶.**

Leviticus records more words from God's mouth than any other book in the Bible. This text is Leviticus' account of moral law, which strikingly shapes the teachings of Jesus. In it, when we pay particular attention to those places where God states clearly "I AM THE LORD" we hear that God is: holy¹, generous even possibly to the point of sacrificial², consistently moral and ethical³, awesome⁴, community oriented⁵, and wholly love⁶. What is more - God is saying that those who acknowledge Yahweh as God are also to be the same. And as if there isn't enough pressure on us this morning, the other texts don't make it any easier on us! From our Epistle we heard:

16Do you not know that *you are God's temple* and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is **holy, and you are that temple . . . all belong to you**, 23and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

The Epistle from 1 Corinthians seems to be saying that we are to be holy, and to become great, unique thinkers, basically contrary to what is accepted as knowledge around us, and yet be simpletons, and also, we are the heirs of life and death and present and future - and greater than Paul or Apollos or Cephas . . .

And I almost hesitate to mention the Gospel which wants us to become greater than evil, more generous than called for, and ends with, "Be **perfect**, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." NO pressure or anything!

It seems that the consistency in our scripture texts for today is trying to tell us something. Something like, connecting and associating ourselves with God is rising above all petty human reactions to life; that God is and therefore we are as well, capable of being above all personal pettiness - so that we can be of best help to all those who are struggling.

For those who haven't seen the video I put up on my Facebook page, there is this clip of a young man driving out of his driveway, almost hitting a child playing on his skateboard, complaining about the boy; driving down the street, complains about the traffic; gets ready to pull into a parking space, and someone steals it right in front of him; goes into the coffee shop, and there is a long line; finally orders his coffee, but has to wait because of the backup. So he begrudgingly sits down to wait. Another man comes over, and hands him a pair of glasses, and as the first man looks down the gift-giver disappears. So the young man puts the glasses on

and notices what power these glasses have. While he wears them, he can see what personal things are going on in the lives of those around him. Titles like, "Avoids relationships for fear of pain," "Discontent with Life" "Unemployed," "Struggling with addiction," "Father who just lost his job," "Grieving her best friend." It becomes too much for him and he runs back to his car and drives home. It ends with him seeing the boy on the skateboard and discovering the child just needs someone to care, so the previously irritated driver befriends him.

Those glasses gave the man God-like powers, he could see in the hearts of total strangers. But the truth is - we don't really need glasses like those. What had changed in the life perception of our hero was that at the beginning all he could see was his own issues, he was the center of the universe. When he was given the opportunity to place himself back into the universe where he was one of a variety of beings wandering this earth together - that is when he became God-like. And we can do that without magic glasses.

Going back to our Sermon text from Leviticus, Sheldon Sorge wrote about it saying, "While the mood in verse 2, '*You shall [be holy]*' is certainly imperative, it may also be declarative, 'In company with me, you shall grow to be like me.'" So according to Mr. Sorge, keeping the Holy One *in view* is the key to our becoming holy. Keeping in mind that we are not the center of the universe, but God - the who created all - the one who is: holy¹, generous even possibly to the point of sacrificial², consistently moral and ethical³, awesome⁴, community oriented⁵, and wholly love⁶ - *that* God *is* the focus of our lives - makes this life a process of being perfect - perfectly remembering who we are and who God is. God is Holy - we are Holy - all of us not just me alone.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel writes about this passage from Leviticus. It is called the "Kedoshim" and he writes that this passage:

"proclaims a different cultural norm. It begins, "Be holy (kedoshim), because I, Adonai your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). But the godly acts described in Kedoshim aren't superhuman. Holiness consists of ordinary everyday godly acts, such as taking care of our families or looking after the rights of the poor and strangers. **Choosing honesty and truth**--that's godly. Paying workers, treating disabled people with respect, refraining from malicious gossip--that's holy. Honoring elders, taking time for study and reflection, forgiveness--that's sacred. God--or at least the experience of Godlike holiness--is available to all of us in the most mundane of acts. Holiness is a spiritual discipline but one that is available to us at any moment. It is more a matter of mindfulness than dramatic behavioral change. end quote

So driving with the other people out there instead of acting as though they should all be watching out for me, is a holy act. Being polite and kind is holy - caring enough to give time and money and energy to other causes, like Hope Alive, Week of Compassion, Feed the Hungry, Camp Starfish, even coming here on Sunday and praying with each other is a holy act.

Remembering that **we** are God's temple means being ready to respond to someone in need and not so self absorbed that we overlook an opportunity to be holy right in front of us.

If you look in the bulletin at the title of my sermon, you can possibly see that there are blank spaces after "*God Is*" & "*We Are*". I did this so at first because I thought there was so much to fill in that I couldn't do anything at all - hinting at the fill in the blanks from following the scripture lessons. Then I saw the blanks as symbolic of the creative process and open-endedness of God and our relationships with our living creator. And yet another possibility is that the blanks are a reminder of the process of becoming holy. IN our everyday, non-super powered but apparently mundane acts of honesty and kindness, thoughtfulness and love - we are holy, we are God's temple. And I thank you for all you do! AMEN