

## ***Sermon***

### ***How Important is it to be Right?***

Pastor Lisa Giacomazza

Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

February 19, 2023

Today is recognized as Transfiguration Sunday, the day when we recognize how Jesus chose to live among the people. We note the day he was recognized by the disciples as the Messiah, as the light of the world, as the son of man. Our lectionary brings us to the seventh Sunday after the Epiphany and just a few days before the start of Lent. Epiphany, the journey that started in Bethlehem when the Magi traveled many miles following light of a single bright star. Each week, we talked of ways that our light or the light we have been given by God matters in the world. That despite how small we feel at times, when we lean upon our faith, big things happen...because we know Jesus.

Our scripture today from Leviticus as was already stated, is a scripture that we rarely hear because it usually gets cut off by the start of Lent but because Easter is a little later this year, it made it into the rotation. Now, it almost was cut by Transfiguration scriptures but because this passage is rarely heard, I thought we might take a deeper dive into it.

YHWH's command of holiness and love in Leviticus 19 resists any attempt to confine it to a time period. The mandate of holiness in verse 2 and the call for the love of the neighbor in verse 18b frame the concrete guidelines of life that God desires for the people of God for all times. ..."you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The question of Christianity's relation to Israel's law cannot be avoided when we open Leviticus. We often detach ourselves from God's law and consider

---

Inspired by [Feasting on the Word, Year A](#) commentary on Leviticus 19:1'-2,9-18 by Sheldon W. Sorge and Lillian Daniel.

\*Excerpt taken from commentary on Matthew 5:38-48 by Barbara J. Essex.

them part of ancient Hebrew tradition, a Jewish belief, one that does not directly apply to us. Bit. Might it be that, in shrugging off the burden, we also lose sight of the blessing that Leviticus intends to lavish on God's people?

In our scripture according to Matthew, Jesus continues his sermon and dives into these very laws outlined in Leviticus...why? Why have these particular laws transcended time and why does Jesus feel compelled to include them during this early part of His ministry? Jesus often says things that make us cringe; he challenges the disciples to do things that seem contrary to human nature. In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells the disciples to turn the other cheek, forgo revenge, give more than the required in a lawsuit, go the extra mile, give to all who beg, lend without limits, love the enemy, pray for persecutors, and greet the stranger. In other words, He challenges the disciples to do the opposite of what seems normal and reasonable.

If we turn the other cheek, don't we risk getting slapped on the other? If we give to all who beg, will we have enough for ourselves? And if I get sued, wouldn't I seek one of the many lawyers I see on TV to make sure I pay as little as possible? I mean let's be honest – have you ever heard of someone losing a lawsuit and asking to pay more than was awarded? And if I'm too nice, am I a pushover and will I be treated like a doormat?

While these laws may seem near impossible to achieve, God makes it clear in both our scriptures one very important thing. He wants us to be in relationship with him and with each other and he wants us to be unified in that relationship. The payoff is clear – we will inherit the kingdom. But this requires trust and humility. Something that our culture has way too little of. We are raised to

---

Inspired by [Feasting on the Word, Year A](#) commentary on Leviticus 19:1'-2,9-18 by Sheldon W. Sorge and Lillian Daniel.

\*Excerpt taken from commentary on Matthew 5:38-48 by Barbara J. Essex.

believe getting ahead is the name of the game, no matter who we hurt in the process. We are more intent on making sure no one has a chance to abuse or take advantage of us. Some of us are so stubborn we would rather be right than be in relationship with others.

Then we focus on the whole perfection piece – another can of worms that make us feel either uncomfortable or overwhelmed. Or worse, unworthy of forgiveness, unworthy of salvation or just unworthy of happiness.

Being a Christian today is a tricky business. So many people in the secular world find God inconvenient, irrelevant or corrupt – or at least the religions that surround the belief in God. Traditional protestant religions are fading away and sometimes when I tell people I'm a Presbyterian, they don't even know what that means. It's true. So are we irrelevant? Is this law unimportant and are there other ways to become a good person who wants to love thy neighbor?

I'm certain that there are many ways to seek relationship with God in this world – the spiritual, not religious mindset if you will. But how does that way of life bring you in relationship with others? How can you truly do good in world if you don't have the opportunity to work together to serve thy neighbor?

\*This text from Matthew carries two challenges. First, Jesus teaches about life in God's realm. God's community is filled with people who think of others first. Every decision and action is carried out for the common good. Each person is sister or brother to the other and acts out of love. The capacity for this kind of love is due to the empowering love given by God, who is love. We are able to be gracious, forgiving, hospitable, and generous because God who showers us with abundant grace, mercy, love and protection. Those who know God's love now can

---

Inspired by [Feasting on the Word, Year A](#) commentary on Leviticus 19:1'-2,9-18 by Sheldon W. Sorge and Lillian Daniel.

\*Excerpt taken from commentary on Matthew 5:38-48 by Barbara J. Essex.

love their enemies; those who experience God's forgiveness now can forgive those who persecute them; those who claim God's gift of generosity can now give back to those who gave little or nothing. And second, Jesus lets his listeners know that he himself embodies these values. We no longer have to rely solely on the written word of God that this is so. We now have living example embodied in Jesus Christ of what it looks like to live these laws. And Jesus shows us time and time again throughout His ministry.

Today we are caught in the tension of human nature and the demands of living in a "me first" culture and being followers of Christ. It's not popular to live this way anymore – maybe it never was and it is so hard to deny ourselves and put service, our calling, first. These teachings assure us that we are not alone in the world and that God continues to work in and through us.

We are amazed everyday how people are able to live into these teachings, risking their own lives to save others, serving in such a way, even in the face of danger, to bring about love and peace in the world. But do you think, what can I really do? How can I really make a change? I can't answer that and do you know why? Because you are so unique, so different than everyone else, that only you can do certain things that this world needs you to do – with the help of God. You are so incredibly prepared for that service that you will be able to do things that others find impossible because it was not what they were called to do in the world. And most importantly, you will be able to do all of these things because you are in relationship with Christ and with other followers who believe we can.

We are the lucky ones who did not turn away from God. We are the ones who followed our star to this place and God's love fills us with the possibility that

---

Inspired by [Feasting on the Word, Year A](#) commentary on Leviticus 19:1'-2,9-18 by Sheldon W. Sorge and Lillian Daniel.

\*Excerpt taken from commentary on Matthew 5:38-48 by Barbara J. Essex.

we may love the world as God has loved us – fully, richly, abundantly and completely.

Amen