

Sermon Draft

Text: Leviticus (18:1–5) 19:9–18

Sermon: “I Am the Lord Your God”

Since Trinity Sunday, we have been working through Luke’s Gospel. We are now in the midst of chapter 10, the second of three Sundays. Last week, we heard the account of Jesus sending, receiving back, and celebrating the work of God through the Seventy-Two. Next week, we will hear about Mary and Martha.

In this week’s Gospel, a lawyer questions Jesus regarding what must be done to inherit eternal life. Jesus points him to the Law and questions how he understands it. The lawyer summarizes by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 with regard to loving God and Leviticus 19:18 (from our text, the Old Testament Reading) regarding loving the neighbor. When Jesus tells the lawyer to do these things, the lawyer asks who his neighbor is. Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan, challenging the lawyer to identify who acted as a neighbor. When the lawyer correctly responds, *“The one who showed mercy,”* Jesus tells him to *“go and do likewise.”*

In the Epistle reading from Colossians Paul gives thanks for the Colossians' faith in Christ and their love for all the saints. He also tells them of his prayers that they may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, grounded in God's work of delivering them from the domain of darkness and transferring them to the kingdom of Jesus.

Leviticus can be a hard read. But it is also full of wonderful words of guidance, and it is good for us to read and study. Our Old Testament reading from Leviticus this morning is one of the most overlooked or even intentionally avoided books of the Old Testament, yet a right understanding of Jesus and his work, indeed a right understanding of justification and sanctification, depends on this central book of the Torah given by God through Moses. In this book, God provides the way for sinful, unholy people to have fellowship with the holy God and to live holy lives.

In broad terms, Leviticus can be divided in half, with the Day of Atonement as the climactic hinge in its center. In the first half, God outlines how he provides his holiness to his people via the means of sacrifice and priesthood graciously instituted by him.

In the second half, God describes the holy life of the people who are holy by their connection to him via the means he has provided.

Our text falls in the second half of the book, the “holy lives” portion. When reading the second half of Leviticus, one does well continually to remember that this material follows what God has done through his appointed means to make his people holy. Thus, as God speaks through Moses in chapter 19, he is speaking to holy people, people made holy by him via his means. That being so, the call to be holy (19:1) is not a call to make oneself holy by what one does, by the things commanded or forbidden in the text. Instead, the call to be holy is the call to live the holy life into which one has been called.

Our text for today’s consideration is from Leviticus 19, but I want to do it a bit differently than what is printed in your bulletin. I invite you to open your Bible to Leviticus 19. Leviticus 19 is a speech that God commanded Moses to speak to the people of Israel. It begins with these words: “*And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy,”*”

Throughout the speech, sections of the speech end with either ***“I am the Lord your God”*** or simply ***“I am the Lord.”*** We are going to focus on a portion of this speech that corresponds well with our Gospel from Luke.

Listen to verses 11–18, in which God speaks about how the Israelites were to interact with one another. ***“You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. ¹² You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.***

¹³ “You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. ¹⁴ You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

¹⁵ “You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. ¹⁶ You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life^[a] of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

¹⁷ “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Verses 33–34 relate to this and expand it, as we shall see. *“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. ³⁴ You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.* And then God ends his speech through Moses with these words: *And you shall observe all my statutes and all my rules, and do them: I am the LORD.”* This is our text.

“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” What does that mean? The structure of Leviticus helps us see. Chapters 1–16 teach us the ways that the holy God provides holiness to his people.

Then Chapters 17–26 speak of how God’s people, made holy by him, live holy lives. God’s holiness makes holy people who live holy lives in holy love.

God alone is holy, but repeatedly in Leviticus we hear God calling on his people to be holy. We can misunderstand this as a demand for the Israelites to make themselves holy by their actions, but that’s the wrong way to hear it. They couldn’t and we can’t make ourselves holy.

Leviticus chapters 1–16 show that God provided sacrifices and priests to perform sacrifices. In this way, God made his people holy. God alone is holy, but repeatedly in the New Testament, God calls us to be holy too.

We can misunderstand this as a demand to make ourselves holy by our actions, but that’s the wrong way to hear it. ***Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”***
Romans 3:28: “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”

We’re holy by grace alone! By faith alone! How can that be? By Christ alone! God makes us holy by giving us the holy life and holy death of Christ Jesus! God provides holiness to us.

Made holy by God's holiness, God's people live holy lives in holy love. Now as part of chapters 17–26, 19:11–18 focuses on life together with other people. Here's what that looks like: Not stealing, dealing falsely, or lying, Not swearing falsely by God's name, Not oppressing or robbing a neighbor, And the list goes on, but here's where it culminates (vs 17–18). Holy people don't hate or bear grudges. Holy people love their neighbor as themselves. Along with loving God, that summarizes well what holy living is. Even the lawyer in today's Gospel understood, quoting 19:18, ***“Love your neighbor as yourself.”***

Holy living involves loving my neighbor, but who is my neighbor? The neighbor is the fellow Israelite. But there's more, verses 33–34 expand this view! The sojourner is to be treated as a native Israelite: love the sojourner as yourself. That's rather radical. The holy people of God are to love unholy, non-Israelites, just as they would love another Israelite or themselves.

We often limit our neighborly love. Sometimes we base this on Bible passages. Sometimes it is simply based on prejudices. The Gospel asks this very question, so Jesus tells the parable.

The parable shows the leaders' failure to love. The parable shows the Samaritan performing neighborly love. What a beautiful picture of Christ's love! He came to us, beaten and dying; he bandaged our wounds and paid what was required for our healing, by his own wounds and death.

God truly expects holy lives like that from his holy people. ***“You shall observe all my statutes and all my rules, and do them: I am the Lord”*** (v 37). ***Hear Matthew 5:48: “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong.³⁴ You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” 1 Peter 1:16: since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” 1 Thessalonians 4:7: “since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”*** God's holiness makes holy people who live holy lives in holy love.

Amen.