



## Gathering in the Word

This morning's readings from Leviticus 19 and Matthew 5 invite us to consider the nature of the divine – and the human – holiness and perfection. As persons and communities—we the Church—are called to lives of stature and holiness—embodying in our day-to-day lives and actions—GOD's call and quest for wholeness. As GOD's people we are challenged to live by a higher standard and to a higher set of values than the surrounding neighborhoods and world. We are not "better" or "set apart" as the apple of GOD's eye—but are called to be mindful of the well-being of others around us—especially the marginalized and disposed!

## Hearing the Word

### Leviticus 19:1-2 (The VOICE Bible)

*People and their land are connected. When people engage in disgusting practices, it affects the land, pollutes it, and makes it sick. But when people live by God's rules, the land is well.*

19 <sup>1</sup>The Eternal One spoke to Moses.

**Eternal One:** <sup>2</sup> *Go, talk with the community of Israel, and tell them that they are to be holy, for I, the Eternal your God, am holy.*

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<sup>9</sup> When you harvest the crops of your land, do not gather *the grain* all the way to the edges of your fields or pick up what was overlooked during the *first round of* harvesting. <sup>10</sup> *Likewise* do not strip the vines bare in your vineyard or gather the fallen grapes. Leave the fallen fruit and some grapes on the vine for the poor and

strangers *living among you*; for I am the Eternal your God.

*God's care for the poor is clearly reflected and codified in these verses. Those who have are to leave something for those who have not. No one is charged to make them care for the poor; God's covenant people are to do this in obedience to His commands. But the poor have a responsibility as well. They are to go and gather the grain left in the fields and collect the clusters left in the vineyard. In this way, they join with the landowners and farmers in caring for themselves and the earth.*

**Eternal One:** <sup>11</sup> Do not take what is not yours or conduct business dishonestly or lie to each other. <sup>12</sup> Do not swear to a lie in my name. If you do, my name is profaned. I am the Eternal One.

<sup>13</sup> Do not mistreat your neighbor or steal from him. Do not keep the payment of a hired hand overnight, *but compensate him for work at the end of the day.* <sup>14</sup> Do not *mock the disabled by shouting a curse* at a deaf person or putting something in the way to trip up the blind. Instead, *honor and fear your God*; I am the Eternal One.

<sup>15</sup> *In a court of law*, do what is just, not unjust. Do not favor *one side or the other*, the poor or the wealthy; instead, judge your neighbor fairly. <sup>16</sup> Do not go around spreading malicious lies about other people. Do not take a stand that would endanger your neighbor's life. I am the Eternal One.

<sup>17</sup> Do not harbor a deep hatred for any of your relatives. If your neighbor is doing something wrong, correct him

or else you could be held responsible for his sin. <sup>18</sup> Do not seek revenge or hold a grudge against any of your people. Instead, love your neighbor as you love yourself, for I am the Eternal One.

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In our Matthew 5 lesson today—Jesus quotes or misquotes Leviticus: Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” Clearly Leviticus 19 is saying this—but there’s no command to hate your enemy in Leviticus 19. Leviticus also teaches that to leave gleanings [*gleaning is the act of collecting leftover crops from farmers' fields after they have been commercially harvested or on fields where it is not economically profitable to harvest*] as we harvest—for the poor. We are not to harvest so completely but to leave something for the poor and stranger—who live in the margins—to take their share!

**Loving neighbor according to Leviticus involves providing from our hard labor for those who do not have enough. So Jesus quotes from here!**

### **Matthew 5:38-48 (The VOICE Bible)**

<sup>38</sup> You know that Hebrew Scripture sets this standard of justice and punishment: take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. <sup>39</sup> But I say this; don’t fight against the one who is working evil against you. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, you are to turn and offer him your left cheek. <sup>40</sup> If someone connives to get your shirt,

give him your jacket as well. <sup>41</sup> If someone forces you to walk with him for a mile, walk with him for two instead. <sup>42</sup> If someone asks you for something, give it to him. If someone wants to borrow something from you, do not turn away.

<sup>43</sup> You have been taught to love your neighbor and hate your enemy. <sup>44</sup> But I tell you this: love your enemies. Pray for those who torment you and persecute you— <sup>45</sup> in so doing, you become children of your Father in heaven. He, after all, loves each of us—good and evil, kind and cruel. He causes the sun to rise and shine on evil and good alike. He causes the rain to water the fields of the righteous and the fields of the sinner. <sup>46</sup> It is easy to love those who love you—even a tax collector can love those who love him. <sup>47</sup> And it is easy to greet your friends—even outsiders do that! <sup>48</sup> But you are called to something higher: “Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

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Jesus is asking, “What kind of people do you want to be?” Essentially what Jesus is saying is “What is your basic desire in life? Is it to forever to watch your own “*bottom line*” or is it to watch the bottom line of other people?

- ✓ To make sure you are taken care of first and foremost—or to take care of others?
- ✓ Who are you really?
- ✓ Are you basically a critical, cynical person who refuses to forget even for a moment that old so-and-so owes you a buck—owes you an apology, owes you an invitation to dinner, and owes you a phone call?

✓Are you so absorbed that you are forever calculating what **you've** got coming?

### **Well—my people—if so—then get of it!!!**

Jesus is teaching us to be tuned to the frequency of gospel love/gospel aloha and we need to apply and use that to all the people around us—including—even those who are bona fide enemies! In verses 43-48, Jesus admits that there is such a thing in life as enemies—people who work against us; who poison the bosses mind against us, who don't like us one bit; who turn up their noses when they see you approaching.

### **Jesus does not ask us to recognize such people like that for anything less than they are—Jesus just asks us to work at loving them!**

"Anybody can love their friends," Jesus says in verse 47, "because that's natural. The real measuring of loving, grace-filled, gospel heart is its ability to drum up some compassion even for the folks with whom you won't spend relaxing evenings around a dining table, even for the people who won't have over for tea because they're too busy sneering at you behind your back!

### **Yes—loving *these folks* is a real challenge— isn't it?**

We are to look at each other and everyone—through Jesus eyes! And that's why Jesus says in verse 45 about GOD sending sunshine and rain on good people and bad people!

## **So what's going on here?**

- ✓ Most likely to remind us of GOD's common grace!
- ✓ This world we live in is a fallen world chock-full of people who don't give GOD the time of day!
- ✓ Even still—Jesus reminds us—GOD sends gifts, talents, love, virtue, successful businesses, and healthy crops to all kinds of people!
- ✓ Jesus says that if GOD can do that—shouldn't we work hard at sticking with and hanging with all kinds of people as well?

**"You need to be perfect like GOD is perfect,"** says Jesus in the end! What being perfect is like being a "perfect tomato" – ripe, mature believers! **We need a whole-hearted, whole-souled commitment to GOD's creation and every person in it!** We need, in short, the eyes of GOD—eyes that scan the horizon not first for what we can get out of life but what we can contribute to life for shalom and flourishing joy to all!

- ✓ This doesn't mean all this is not difficult to do!
- ✓ None of this is meant to sweep under the pulpit the fact that sometimes people wound and hurt us badly—that at best—we can love them only from a distance because the relationship is shattered and broken!
- ✓ None of this is meant to deny that we need to allow our government to punish con artists and those who intentionally suck the lifeblood out of us or our neighbors!
- ✓ None of this is meant to deny that sometimes the process of forgiveness can take years!
- ✓ None of this is meant to deny the phenomenon perhaps all of us have experienced at one time or

another: just about the time you think you've forgiven Kimo—you are reminded of something which sets you right back to square one again! (Sometimes time does not so much heal all wounds as it mutes them a bit!)

All this *is* meant to say that in the midst of a world full of jagged edges and crooked people—**Jesus is trying to mold a certain kind of heart!** But in a world of clutching egos, rampant crime, legitimate hurt feelings, genuine enemies, and clueless people who bungle and mess up our lives—we need all the help we can get.

**And that is what Jesus is saying here—that Jesus is there to help us by his Holy Spirit in living all this out—too!**

### **Doing the Word**

So what is the Word of God for us this morning?

#### **1. ONE: WE ARE TO BE LIKE GOD AND LOVE PERFECTLY!**

- ✓ As God loves all people—we too should love everyone—even those who treat us hatefully!
- ✓ Jesus also calls us to love this way too—even as he was on the cross and asked God's forgiveness for those who crucified him!
- ✓ We are to overcome the deep-seated feelings of "us" and "them"—the "we-they" distinction. We and They are all loved by GOD!



## **2.TWO: WE CHRISTIANS—THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST—ARE TO EXCEED CONVENTIONAL EXPECTATIONS AND NORMS!**

- ✓ The familiar teaching—"an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"—is changed by Jesus.
- ✓ Jesus teaches to respond to violence with pacifism and respond to thievery with an offer to take even more of one's possessions.

## **3.THREE: ONLY GOD IS HOLY!**

- ✓ Yes we are to 'mimic' GOD's traits spelled out in Matthew 5!
- ✓ We are to be holy as GOD is holy!
- ✓ We are to mimic fairness and non-exploitation of others—especially those who are most fragile or vulnerable around us!
- ✓ We are called to "to the second mile"!
- ✓ How do we really do this?

### **Sent in the Word**

*"The bread you do not use is the bread of the hungry. The garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of the person who is naked. The shoes you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot. The money you keep locked away is the money of the poor. The acts of charity you do not perform are the injustices you commit."*

*— Basil of Caesarea*