

LEVITICUS 19: 1

BE HOLY AS I AM HOLY

It's not very often we're given a reading from Leviticus. Some day, (not today) we'll spend some serious time with this book. For today though, let me just say a few things for context:

The book of Leviticus is from the Priestly source, written fairly late in Israel's history. It functioned, at least in part, as a manual for priests. What to do, for example, if someone has a skin disease? Or what kind of offering is necessary under certain conditions....so for each example they would look up the proper answer.

Chapters 17-26 were originally a separate document, and together, those chapters are called the Holiness Code. It contains rules about almost every part of life. How to live as a holy people: what to eat, how to work, what about sex, what about money....Israel believed that every part of life belonged to God, and so there developed rules about those things. Now: some people dismiss that, make fun of it, even....saying.... "imagine....rules about every single thing...how silly is that"

But the important thing is the principle behind that code. Life is a gift from God. A holy gift from a holy God. To say thank you for that gift, we need to live lives that are holy. Doesn't that make sense? It makes perfect sense to me. You find that too in other religions. For example, in Celtic spirituality, you'll find prayers for milking cows, prayers for planting potatoes....I'm not sure but probably for changing diapers, and so on. The principle is that every part of life is holy. Every moment, every task, belongs to God. The principle is perfect. It's HOW to do that that gets tricky, and where people tend to argue with one another.

When I was little, we used to make fun of my grandmother. At Christmas time, or on her birthday, she'd receive lovely gifts: a pretty blouse or scarf, some fragrant soap....and what did she do with them? Right. She put them away in a drawer. "They're too nice to use" she'd say. We laughed at that. I find myself doing the same thing sometimes now.

So many times we do the same thing with the idea of being a person of faith – being holy. What IS it to be holy, what does it mean that God is holy?

Are we being called to life-in-a-drawer? Separated from real life in case you get dirty?

In the Bible, there is a strong call to be holy as God is holy. Part of the meaning of that holiness is to be set aside for a purpose. Set aside. Made for a special purpose. How would you do that? How would a person live out the truth of being holy? What does the Bible mean by that?

How? By being IN the world – IN the mess and the mud, the glory and the ambiguity....IN IT. Whatever else it may mean to be holy, the force of it seems to be incarnational. The force of this reading for example ... read on in the chapter. God is holy, and has infused holiness ...not like some foreign substance, a cloak, a candy coating hovering or covering our flawed and unholy lives....NO! God's holiness is IN creation. In our flesh and blood. In trees and lakes and waterbugs and mountains.....and also in the dish washing and floor sweeping and tooth brushing and diaper changing of every day. HOLINESS. We love to write it large, massively elsewhere. But so much of being holy boils down to what each of us does every day between breakfast and bedtime. And afterward, too.

If we are holy as God is holy, we need to get out of that dresser drawer, and live.

Today we have had the incredible honour of baptizing Kayla and Madison.

Two beautiful women; at different times and stages of their lives.

Kayla – a young woman, strong, compassionate, smart, and feeling called by God to make this public declaration. She loves God. She wants to be a follower of Jesus. AND - she's chosen US as the family to walk with her. If that is not holy, I don't know what is.

Madison – two months old. Brought here by her parents, who are in awe of the miracle of her birth; wanting to very best for their daughter. They know that somehow the very best they can give her is more than food and shelter, toys and clothes...something in them knows that the very best they can give their daughter will be a sense of herself; a place for wonder, an opportunity for praise. They want her to grow up in the knowledge that she is loved and precious – made for a purpose. In a word – she is holy. AND they have chosen US as the people they trust to help them with this task. This holy task.

This, my friends, is a holy moment if ever there was one.

I hope that you'll remember a lot about today's service. But more than anything else, I pray that you'll remember the words of the scriptures for today: be holy as God is holy.

You've felt the water on your forehead – you are holy. You have been created for a purpose. You will never be alone.

And you are unique in the world There is a life to be lived that only you can live.

There are words to be spoken that only you can speak. You've been given the astounding gift of life and breath, - to be holy means that you will not squander your measure of breath on words that hurt – but rather, you will breathe blessing and life, you will speak love and point to God, the giver of life.

Life is holy – and it's creator is holy.

And calls the creation – YOU – to a holiness – to a joyful awareness that wonders have not yet ceased
that there are possibilities not yet dreamed of
that hope is an authentic stance
and it is not too late to build a better world.

May you stand in the presence of God in abiding astonishment
and say to every new day
Holy, holy, holy.

Amen