

Leviticus 19

The Lord said to Moses, 2 Say to the whole community of the Israelites: You must be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy. 15 You must not act unjustly in a legal case. Do not show favoritism to the poor or deference to the great; you must judge your fellow Israelites fairly. 16 Do not go around slandering your people. Do not stand by while your neighbor's blood is shed; I am the Lord. 17 You must not hate your fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your fellow Israelite strongly, so you don't become responsible for his sin. 18 You must not take revenge nor hold a grudge against any of your people; instead, you must love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 2

2 As you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, our visit with you wasn't a waste of time. 2 On the contrary, we had the courage through God to speak God's good news in spite of a lot of opposition, although we had already suffered and were publicly insulted in Philippi, as you know. 3 Our appeal isn't based on false information, the wrong motives, or deception. 4 Rather, we have been examined and approved by God to be trusted with the good news, and that's exactly how we speak. We aren't trying to please people, but we are trying to please God, who continues to examine our hearts. 5 As you know, we never used flattery, and God is our witness that we didn't have greedy motives. 6 We didn't ask for special treatment from people—not from you or from others— 7 although we could have thrown our weight around as Christ's apostles. Instead, we were gentle with you like a nursing mother caring for her own children. 8 We were glad to share not only God's good news with you but also our very lives because we cared for you so much.

Psalms 90

**90 Lord, you have been our help,
generation after generation.
2 Before the mountains were born,
before you birthed the earth and the inhabited world—
from forever in the past
to forever in the future, you are God.
3 You return people to dust,
saying, "Go back, humans,"
4 because in your perspective a thousand years
are like yesterday past,
like a short period during the night watch.
5 You sweep humans away like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning.
6 True, in the morning it thrives, renewed,
but
13 Come back to us, Lord!
Please, quick!
Have some compassion for your servants!
14 Fill us full every morning with your faithful love**

so we can rejoice and celebrate our whole life long.

15 Make us happy for the same amount of time that you afflicted us—
for the same number of years that we saw only trouble.

16 Let your acts be seen by your servants;
let your glory be seen by their children.

17 Let the kindness of the Lord our God be over us.

Make the work of our hands last.

Make the work of our hands last! It came evening it withers, all dried up.

Matthew 22

34 When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had left the Sadducees speechless, they met together.

35 One of them, a legal expert, tested him. **36** “Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

37 He replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being,^[c] and with all your mind. **38** This is the first and greatest commandment. **39** And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.^[d] **40** All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

41 Now as the Pharisees were gathering, Jesus asked them, **42** “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” “David’s son,” they replied. **43** He said, “Then how is it that David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, called him Lord when he said, **44** The Lord said to my lord, ‘Sit at my right side until I turn your enemies into your footstool’? **45** If David calls him Lord, how can he be David’s son?” **46** Nobody was able to answer him. And from that day forward nobody dared to ask him anything.

Sermon

Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise.

Lord, open our hearts and our lives will sing out your name. Amen.

A blessed Reformation Day to you! The astute liturgical theologians among you might have noticed that these are not the typical Reformation Day readings. They're the texts assigned for the Sunday before Reformation Day, which is actually October 31st. We just celebrate it on Sunday because we know you're not choosing church over trick-or-treating and Halloween parties.

However, though these aren't the originally assigned texts for today's festival, these passages are chalk full of Reformation themes. Jesus finds himself in a controversy with the religious establishment over interpretation and application of Scripture, and specifically interpretation that centers upon his identity as the Messiah, God's only child, the one who saves us all. As we know, the reformation centers upon that question as well: who is Jesus

for us? Paul confronts opposition to the Gospel within a community he knows and loves, which was also a core conviction of the reformers: to reform the improper behavior and belief of the church that they loved. Leviticus speaks of neighbor love, a central tenet of Luther's theology and a continued emphasis of later reformation traditions. Contextualized within the Reformation story, these readings can provide for us a fresh perspective on the vitality of the Reformation in our present lives

In the Gospel of Matthew, only two types of characters dare to test Jesus: Satan and the Pharisees. Other players might ask questions or confront him, but the Gospel only uses the word "test" in relation to the Devil and these religious insiders. In both situations, the test originates with persons who were once close to God - Satan, after all, was a fallen angel, while the Pharisees knew God's law while missing God's heart - and so they fail to see the presence of God before them in the person of Jesus. Though

Jesus lives as the fulfillment of the Law, the religious elite seek to trap him in a semantic argument about the Torah: “you know, all the commandments are great, so which is the greatest?” Instead, Jesus confounds his testers by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5’s encouragement to love God with all of yourself with a new command: love your neighbor as yourself. It’s truly a new command, per se; rather, it sums up the intent of all the laws relating to relationships. This juxtaposition of loving God and loving neighbor suggests to Jesus’s testers that love of God leads to love of neighbor, and love of neighbor reveals love of God. As interdependent equals, these commands sum the entire revelation of God.

Because it’s so strange, let’s talk for a second about the very end of the Gospel passage. Jesus responds to the Pharisees with a test of his own, a request for the Pharisees to interpret Psalm 110:1, where David refers to the messiah as “Lord.” Since Israel

expected a descendant of David to appear as messiah, and since Hebrew descendants were culturally considered subordinates to parents and ancestors, the question confounds the Pharisees. In other words, parents were always superiors to children. For modern readers, as those who confess Jesus as God incarnate, the question itself may seem absurd, and the Pharisees ignorance even more so. Why does it matter if David calls Jesus Lord? Yet, perhaps we can see that our own cultural baggage limits us from seeing the fullness of God, just as it confounded the Pharisees and prevented them from seeing the fullness of God before them, Jesus who is the son of David and who lives as David's Lord. What assumptions do we make that blind block our vision from the work of God? How does our location in space and time shape us to ignore the work of God in amongst us? We, too, find ourselves stumped by the presence of God in our midst.

This will preach, especially at this time of year. Reformation

Sunday reminds us not only the need for constant reformation in the life of faith but also the brokenness of the church. Rather than unite all Christians under the purity of the Gospel, Luther's reformation movement ultimately led to the proliferation of denominationalism, the fracturing of the Body of Christ. Rather than reform the one church, the movement ripped God's people apart. Rather than lead to a holy equality among all people, our malformed pursuit of God separates us from our neighbors, our sisters and brothers, the other images of God in the world. That's a brokenness that still needs reform.

On Halloween weekends like this, children and adults alike will dress as someone else, some out of the simple joy of the holiday, but all too many others out of a desire to be someone, anyone, else. We've somehow forgotten in the midst of the reformation of the church that God formed us as beloved and

reformed us in Christ's image because God loves us. That's a brokenness that needs reform.

Further, the popularity of costumes that objectify the body, especially those of women, sensualizes a holiday that once commemorated the faithful departed. After all, Halloween comes from the term, "All Hallows Eve," a vigil where we used to gather as a church to give thanks for all the saints of the past and to learn from the lives of the faithful departed. Instead, our lust for neighbors and commodification of our bodies distances us from the God who formed us in our mother's womb, who knows the number of hairs upon our heads. That's a brokenness that needs reform. Along with Satan and the Pharisees, we too test God.

Yet, when we hold the commandment to love God and love neighbor in the holy tension of the Reformation spirit, we may find transformation. Transformation out of objectifying others' bodies all while loathing our own and instead transformed into creatures

that love our God and our neighbors as ourselves and actually loving ourselves as God intended.. Transformation away from our personal preferences as Lutherans or Pentecostals or Roman Catholics and transformed into the one, holy, universal, apostolic church sent to bring the good tidings of great joy that Jesus is alive to all the world. Though denominations seem the norm until Jesus brings a new heaven and earth to fruition, we may come to see the light of God reflected through the one prism of the church, with multiform images offering us unique views into the heart of God and the trajectory of God's community. Though we, like Paul, see opposition to the Gospel and to the work of Jesus in our lives, we may find apostles, faithful despite their own flaws, who guide us into renewed communion with God. Imperfect characters like Moses and Luther arise along with present day saints to help to bring repentance and reformation into our God-given identity. As sinners justified by the grace of God, we see these exemplars

guiding us into lives where we too admit our faults as we pursue the kind of life God has in store for us. We may find ourselves reformed and reforming.

What seems most important, most pressing here, isn't that we're descendants of a reformation. It's that we're a reforming people. I read an article this morning that almost made me change my entire sermon. Written by Stanley Hauerwas, a Methodist/Episcopal professor of ethics at Duke University Divinity School, it's title is: "The Reformation is over. Protestants won. So why are we still here?" Hauerwas rightly points out that the initial tenets of the Reformation - stopping indulgences, emphasizing the centrality of Christ and scripture, reinforcing God's work - have been generally accepted by all Christians, including Roman Catholics through the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican Council. That Reformation, Hauerwas argues, is ending. So why are we still Protestants? In Stanley's words, *I have the conviction*

that the ongoing change that the church needs means some of us must be Protestant to keep Catholics honest about their claim to the title of the one true Catholic Church. The Reformation may be coming to an end, but reform in the church is never-ending, requiring some to stand outside looking in.

Stanley may be right in his own reasoning, but I believe we have another reason to remain solidly within Reformation traditions. To stop reforming indicates that we believe we've achieved perfection, that God's finished working on us, in us, or through us. None of that is true! God's interested in our lives and wants to make our lives more interestingly holy. God's invested in our lives as individuals and as a church and so wants to constantly re-form us - see the origin of the word - closer into the image and likeness of Jesus. In fact, reform is at the very heart of our faith, seen in worship every week when God forgives us of sin. Sin suggests that there's something wrong in our lives. While

forgiveness removes blame from us, it doesn't fix the problem.

Only transformation, only reform, which is itself the work of the Holy Spirit, truly rids us of the plague of sin itself.

And further, there's too many people that experience the church's imperfection as judgement, as condemnation, as oppression, for us to believe we don't still need reform. We still need reform because extreme poverty and extreme wealth still separate Christians from one another. We still need reform because our gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer siblings in Christ are still oppressed. We still need reform because racism still lives in the church, not just in individuals but in the systems and structures of the organization. We still need reform because women experience wage inequity and sexual assault not just in society but in our congregations. We don't need the reforms that Luther called for 500 years ago. Thank God for that. But do not let that victory fool you into thinking that we don't need reform.

We all, every one of us in this sanctuary, every Lutheran, every Christian, every single person, needs reform.

Within this tension, the greatest commandments seem most appropriate because we experience an example of what that looks like in and through Jesus. As the Son of God, Jesus completely loves the Father with heart, soul, and mind, seen in his embrace of imperfect humanity alongside the perfect divinity of God. In this human form, Jesus echoes the commands we see in Leviticus becomes the perfect neighbor, the one who consistently loves neighbors as himself, and often even more than himself. Soon in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus will refuse to harbor hate or vengeance toward his neighbors despite their unjust judgment that leads to his ridicule and death. Jesus is the sign-act of the greatest commandment, loving God enough to take up the cross and loving neighbors enough not to judge them for it. Surely we need this type of reformation, to more fully love God and one another, to live

the love we see in the example of Jesus. We may never achieve that perfection. So it seems we will always need Reformation.

Amen.