

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTACOST 10/25/20

LEVITICUS 19:1-2, 15-18; PSALM 1; 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-8

MATTHEW 22:34-46

GOOD MORNING

THE CENTRAL THEME FOR TODAY SEEMS TO BE IN GENERAL LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR, AND THE GREATEST COMMANDMENTS.

THE BOOK OF LIVITICUS SEEMS TO BE ABOUT GOD TELLING HIS PEOPLE HOW TO LIVE IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES, IN GREAT DETAIL. THE MOST IMPORTANT SENTENCE TO ME, IS THE VERY LAST LINE: "... YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR". WE WILL SEE THIS SAME LINE IN OUR GOSPEL TODAY ONLY SPOKEN BY JESUS. THIS IS A GREAT EXAMPLE OF HOW THE OLD TESTAMENT (WHICH IS OUR HEBREW HERITAGE) CAME TO PLAY IN THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY. WE ARE TRULY A PART OF JUDEAN CHRISTIANITY!

WHEN JESUS WAS ASKED WHICH COMMANDMENT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT, IT WAS A LOADED QUESTION. THE

PHARISEES WERE TRYING TO TRAP JESUS, BUT JESUS TURNED THE TRAP ON THEM. ALL OF THE COMMANDMENTS WERE EQUAL BECAUSE THEY WERE CREATED BY GOD. JESUS USED THE OPPORTUNITY TO POINT OUT THAT ALL OF THE LAWS THAT THE PHARISEES CAME UP WITH TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT THE JEWS KEPT THE COMMANDMENTS WERE NOT NECESSARY. (READ LITVICUS IN ITS ENTIRETY FOR THIS LIST!) ALL OF THEIR LAWS. AND ALL THE COMMANDMENTS, WERE SUMMARIZED BY THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS THAT JESUS GAVE TO THE PHARISEES: LOVE GOD AND LOVE PEOPLE". BOTH COMMANDMENTS ARE RELATED AND ARE OF EQUAL IMPORTANCE. THEY ARE THE BASIS OF CHRISTIANITY.

BUT WHAT IF LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR MEANS THAT WE NEED TO LISTEN TO THE WORLD AND BE ENGAGED WITH IT? ESPECIALLY DURING THESE TRYING TIMES! THERE WAS A TIME WHEN NEIGHBORS HELPED EACH OTHER WITH A HARVEST. OR CARE FOR SICK NEIGHBORS (DO WE EVEN KNOW OUR NEIGHBOR'S FIRST NAME?) THOSE CARING EXAMPLES OF LOVING PEOPLE AS GOD LOVED US. THE WAY

GOD KNOWS THAT WE LOVE HIM IS BY HOW WE TREAT PEOPLE. WHENEVER WE DEMONSTRATE KINDNESS, PATIENCE OR GENTLENESS, WE SEE THE LORD'S LOVE AT WORK THROUGH US, EXPECIALLY WHEN THE OTHER PERSON HAS BEEN UNKIND AND DOESN'T DESERVE SUCH PLEASANT TREATMENT. OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS DEMAND PRIORITY OVER THINGS THAT WON'T LAST OR WON'T MATTER IN A FEW YEARS. IF WE LOVE GOD AND LOVE PEOPLE, WE WILL NATURALLY OBEY THE REST OF THE COMMANDMENTS. AFTER ALL, THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS ARE AN EXAMPLE OF THE GOLDEN RULE.

IT IS OUR FAITH THAT GOD LOVES US THAT MAKES US ABLE TO LOVE OURSELVES AND THEREFORE BE GRATEFUL FOR THE GIFT OF OURSELVES. THIS AWARENESS OF LIFE AS A GIFT IS WHAT WE MEAN BY LOVING GOD. WHEN WE LOVE OURSELVES, WE ARE GRATEFUL TO GOD, AND THIS GRATITUDE SETS US FREE TO LOVE OTHER PEOPLE. WHEN WE TRULY LOVE PEOPLE, WE VALUE THEM AS GIFTS OF GOD.

JESUS' TEACHING ISN'T ABOUT HOW WE FEEL ABOUT GOD AND NEIGHBOR, BUT WHAT WE WILL DO. WE ARE TO LOVE GOD WITH ALL OUR LIVES, INCLUDING OUR WORK. DOING SO RESTRICTS OUR ACTIVITY TO THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW PATH THAT GOD HAS CREATED FOR US TO WALK ON. IT IS THE BASIS OF OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD. IT SHOWS THAT OUR LOVE FOR GOD IS NUMBER ONE IN OUR LIVES. LOVE FOR GOD AND LOVE FOR ALL OF THOSE WHO ARE MADE IN HIS IMAGE FORM THE BACKBONE OF EVERYTHING GOD SAYS TO US IN HIS WORD. IN THE WORD OF THE APOSTLE PAUL IN ROMANS 13:10: "LOVE IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW."

I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU A PRAYER FROM OUR BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, EVENING PRAYER II, PAGE 124. IT DREW MY ATTENTION IN THE FORWARD DAY-BY-DAY FOR JAN – MAR 2020 WHEN THE PANDEMIC BECAME A REALITY. I NOW MAKE IT A PART OF MY PERSONAL EVENING PRAYERS AND I HOPE YOU WILL TOO!

**“KEEP WATCH, DEAR LORD, WITH THOSE WHO WORK, OR
WATCH, OR WEEP THIS NIGHT, AND GIVE YOUR ANGELS
CHARGE OVER THOSE WHO SLEEP. TEND THE SICK, LORD
CHRIST; GIVE REST TO THE WEARY, BLESS TH3E DYING,
SOOTHE THE SUFFERING, PITY THE AFFLICTED, SHEILD THE
JOYOUS; AND ALL FOR YOUR LOVE’S SAKE.”**

AMEN