

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, & strength,  
and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

A lot of folks say that's all we need.

Keep it simple: love God, love your neighbor,  
and no need for anything else.

In fact, there's a bumper sticker that even lets us leave out  
all that embarrassing God stuff: "Kindness is my religion," it says.

Simplicity is good, but the world isn't simple,  
and I don't think God is, either.

The summary of the law & the prophets is a great summary,  
but it's not a replacement.

Because the real world is complicated and difficult.

Because we are really, really good at lying to ourselves.  
Bumper sticker theology just isn't enough.



So the righteous among us have rules they follow. Habits. Practices.

Things they do that some people admire them for,  
and other people laugh at them for.

But they do it all the same, day in and day out.

Some righteous people are political, in the best sense of the word.

They devote themselves to a cause.

Frances Perkins was Secretary of Labor under FDR,  
the first female cabinet member in our country.

She felt a call to improve the lives of working-class people  
and she devoted herself to it.

She pushed, she made deals, she compromised,  
and bit by bit she made things better.

Sometimes she was praised, other times she was ridiculed.  
But she was devoted, she was righteous, to her calling.

Some righteous people are moral, in the best sense of the word.  
They identify what a moral life looks like  
and they refuse to compromise their lives, no matter the cost.  
Dorothy Day was like that. Mother Teresa was like that.



Some righteous people are also religious. Teresa, Dorothy, & Frances were.  
The religious ones have daily rules for both prayer AND service.  
Our psalm calls these people trees planted by water.  
They bear fruit for the rest of us.  
Their roots anchor the soil that the rest of us rely on.

When hard times come they stand tall and remind us  
that the LORD will never abandon us.  
And when the rest of us laugh at their righteousness  
they stand silent, but firm.



This morning we hear from a book of righteousness - Leviticus.  
Leviticus was written over 2,500 years so it takes  
some interpreting at this point.  
Leviticus teaches a people trying trying to put their world back together  
how to live a righteous life.

Leviticus even has its own Summary of the Law:

"Be holy," it says, "for I the LORD your God am holy."



Our reading this morning was just a snippet of ch. 19 of Leviticus,  
but y'all are lucky.

I'm going to walk you through chs. 18-19 - 2 whole chapters!

(I'll bet none of you thought you would hear a sermon on Leviticus today!)

So...Ch. 18 is about sexual morality, which is just a hoot to preach about.

It's easy to dismiss the ancient wisdom in Ch. 18

just because we know a little bit more about human sexuality  
than we used to.

Read Chapter 18 with an open mind.

Notice the ethics underneath the rules,

and remember how sexual infidelity

breaks apart families and communities as much today  
as it did 2,500 years ago.

Remember what we know about child trafficking

and sexual assault and power differentials.

Leviticus still speaks to us, if we'll listen.

"Be holy," it says, "because I the Lord am holy."



Chapter 19 is a collection of rules for how to be righteous.

Verse 3 says, “Honor your father and mother.” That sounds familiar.

Family relationships can be complicated, for some of us - painful.

Even so, the righteous find a way to authentically honor  
their parents, even when the relationship is...difficult?

Verse 4 says, “Do not turn to idols.”

This is another sermon, but I am convinced that idolatry  
is the most dangerous sin America faces right now.

Verses 9 & 10 say, “When you reap the harvest,  
you shall leave the very edges of your field for the poor & the alien:  
I am the Lord your God.”

These verses are why we have things like Atlanta Comm. Food Bank  
and DEAM, and PORCH.

And our cold weather ministry. And our sack lunch ministry.

Verses 11-13 say, “You shall not steal; you shall not lie to one another.  
You shall not cheat your neighbor  
and you shall not mess around with the paychecks  
of people who are struggling to get by.”

In a global economy, in a gig-worker economy,  
an economy where we pay people to open & close a store  
but not to work the slow hours in-between,  
the need for righteousness towards our employees  
is as important as it’s ever been.

Verse 14: Do not look down on someone with a disability  
or some other vulnerability. You shall fear your God.

Verse 15: Judge the poor and rich equally.  
Judge the poor as if they were not powerless,  
the rich as if they were not powerful.

Verse 18: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge."  
You can go current events here, but you might go personal,  
to your spouse, your friends, or even to driving in Atlanta traffic.  
"You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge."

Now...verses 27-28 are about beards and tattoos,  
and I'm sorry, but there's a limit to a preacher's courage.  
You don't talk about beards and tattoos in Decatur,  
so we'll just move right past that one.

Also, verse 29. Chris Rock built a whole comedy skit around verse 29,  
so I'll leave that one alone, too (but you can Google it).

And finally, verses 33-34 are as important now as when they were written.  
When aliens reside in your country,  
DO NOT oppress them or exploit them.

In fact, it says, "you shall love the alien as yourself,"  
"because you were aliens in Egypt and you still would be  
except I, the LORD, had mercy on you."



There are...a lot of rules in Leviticus.

Jesus summarizes them by saying to love God and love your neighbor,  
but when he says that he isn't dismissing all those rules.  
He's pointing to them.

And of course we fall short. Of course we do.

Even our mighty oaks fall short.

That's why Jesus is not just a teacher,  
but the one who redeems us when we fall short.



This morning, I want to invite you to take on two kinds of righteousness.  
Righteousness with your time and your money.

Time & money drive most of our day to day decisions.

We earn our money by giving up our time in exchange for it.

Do I give up more of my time to make more money,  
or do I take less money to have more time for the people I love?

This morning I'd like you to consider a different question:  
what do I give to the one who has given me everything?



How much of my time do I set aside for rest & quiet & play,  
for worship & prayer?

If your life is so full, even full of good stuff,  
that you don't have time to be still and rest in the LORD,  
then I invite you...gently...without judgment or condemnation...  
to give back to God 1 full day out of the week.

To maybe save YOUR life by giving back 1 day a week  
to the one who gave you all 7 in the first place.

And yes, this is kind of about church, but not really.

This is about you keeping sabbath.

You are a child of God. You get a sabbath, too.



The second invitation is about your money.

And, yes, this is kind of about our fall pledge campaign.

Holy Trinity has a good case to make for your support in 2024,  
and together, we'll use it faithfully.

But that's not what this is really about.

I invite you...gently...without any judgment or condemnation...

to take 1 out of every 10 dollars you earn

and give it back to God and God's work in the world.

If you can't get to 10%, then start where you are. Do what you can do.

Give it to Holy Trinity. Or Water-Life-Hope or United Way

or Ronald McDonald House or Meals on Wheels,

or give it to your neighbor who's lost her job

or the guy who needs a hotel for the night.

What's crucial for YOUR soul is that you give, regularly and sacrificially...

so that you control your money instead of it controlling you...

so that in addition to considering YOUR needs,

you weigh your neighbor's needs with that same love & discipline.

See, loving God begins with your time,

and loving your neighbor begins with your possessions.

I know not everybody here can do what I'm asking today.

Not everybody can keep a full day's sabbath

or give away 10% of their income. Not everybody should.

But I am absolutely convinced that at least 90% of us here

could become those people,

could give 1 day a week to remember they are God's beloved,

could give 1 dollar out of 10 for God's work in the world.



Those mighty oaks I was talking about before,

the ones who are both righteous and religious...

I've noticed they have strong opinions just like the rest of us.

Political opinions, cultural opinions,

ideas about the neighborhood & their schools & the church.

But they don't seem to spend much energy on the arguments of the day.

They seem to stay focused on the causes they've committed to.

They remember to take time for prayer and rest.

They never stop being generous with their possessions.

Not all of us get to be mighty oaks.

I don't think I'll ever be anything more than a Charlie Brown Christmas tree.

But if you've ever wondered why some people seem to be different,

if you've ever thought that you'd like to be a little more

like them, start with your time, and your money.

Give them both back to God.

You'll be amazed at what he can do with you. Amen