

Ordinary 7 A **Leviticus 19:1-2 9-18 1 Corinthians 3:10-11 16-23 Matthew 5:38-48**

Scott MALCOLM

“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God, am holy.”

This is a great thundering crash of a statement, when it comes to preaching. You can just imagine the old fire and brimstone preachers and priests hanging over their pulpits, and eyeballing their congregations with this tasty bit of law hanging from their mutton chops!

In the old King James Version, it’s even sharper, “be Ye holy as I am holy,” saith the Lord!”

The trouble with this kind of firebrand preaching, is that it gives entirely the wrong impression about what this great preaching statement means.

The preachers meant it to stir and challenge their folk into doing and being better. But instead, it often alienated, intimidated, and even frightened them into feeling like possums caught in Gods headlights. Dazed, dazzled, and not knowing which way to run! So, they ran nowhere, hoping that was ok!

Because of this, I think we have a disturbed view of what it means to be holy. We think it means to be clean. A holy thing is a clean thing. It has no dirt on it. A holy person is a clean person, they have no dirt on them.

They don't have grubby thoughts, or say bad words. They aren't grumpy or depressed. They wear clean underwear and have nice manners.

They pray, and are regular at church, they might fast, and people will think their relationship with God is much better than theirs is. These people are above the ordinary, above grubby, dirty ... grimy, ordinary folk. They are pure. Clean.

In our Church we bow before the altar; as we enter the sanctuary, or walk past it to read the scriptures. We bow before one another in the sanctuary as the Eucharist is prepared. Some people do it as they leave the worship space.

Everyone who comes into the sanctuary to serve at the altar, wears white. To begin with I thought it was because white was the symbol of purity! It’s not, the white gowns are a symbol of our baptism.

Now don't get me wrong, I’m not saying there is anything wrong with these respectful acts of devotion, only that if we’re not careful they can give the wrong impression, a bit like the thundering preachers of long ago.

And that impression is that these actions and colours suggest that these things, this place, the people up here dressed in white ... are holy ...

but our readings for today, say something completely different.

I love this lectionaries choice from Leviticus, who preaches from Leviticus? But it is from Leviticus that we read that being holy has nothing to do with places, things, or the colour you wear to do religious things. There is nothing in here about praying or reading your bible, either.

What it says, is that to be holy, you need to treat the people who live in community with you, with love and respect. To be holy, is not to be mean with your harvest. Not stealing from your neighbours. Not lying. Being honest in all your dealings. Looking out for those who are struggling. Not favouring the rich. Being fair. Not hating or bearing a grudge, no gossip ...

In short, loving your neighbour as yourself.

In Leviticus we are regarded as holy, if we treat others in our community with love and respect.

Matthew says if we are to be Jesus disciples, we must listen to his teaching ... and put it in to practise.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew goes on to say, ... this is how we love this is how we live in the Kingdom. This is how ... we are holy.

By listening to Jesus words ... and doing them.

But this is not about being good people. That impression would be just as false as the thundering preacher's or the idea that holiness is about being clean. Paul writes, that holiness has its foundation in Christ, in his death and resurrection.

By the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have become the temple of God, and that temple is Holy.

...

Now, as beautiful as this space is, this physical building is not Gods temple. This is the house where Gods temple meets. This sanctuary, as lovely as it is, is not God's temple. It is the place Gods Temple receives the Eucharist.

Buildings are not holy. Places in buildings are not holy. It is Gods temple that is holy. And what is Gods Temple?

You are. We are.

Holiness doesn't reside up here. It resides out there. Holiness doesn't rest in these white robes. Doesn't live in this space or this building. That is not to say that this building and this space is not special, is not precious, is not important ... but it is to say ... it's not holy. You are holy. We are ... we are holy ... as we gather, to do what we are doing today.

...

We are a holy people, made so by treating others with love and respect.
We are a holy people, made so by hearing Jesus words and putting them in to practise.
We are a holy people, made so by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God, am holy!” No, not anymore.

“We are holy, for you Lord, have made us holy ... in your Son.”

A holy people, your temple.
Gathered in word and song, in wine and bread.
In love and respect for others.

Hearing Jesus words and doing them.

Amen.