

'People made Holy for holy purposes'

Read: ¹ The LORD said to Moses, ² "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy. ¹⁵ "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly. ¹⁶ "Do not go about spreading slander among your people. "Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour's life. I am the LORD. ¹⁷ "Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbour frankly so you will not share in their guilt. ¹⁸ "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD.

Pray: Father speak to each of us today and saturate us in your Holy word, so that we might be set apart and made holy through your power. Reveal to us how we can be and live as your holy people in this place. Guide us we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

1. Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.

Be holy. You could hear this a few different ways...

- You will be holy
- You shall be holy
- You are holy

Sounds great – now all we need to know is exactly what 'Holy' means. What does it mean?

- Is God calling you to be a holy Joe - A do-gooder that tries hard to do the right thing? If this were the case, wouldn't God have commanded us to be do-gooders or good people? But the call is clear – it's a call to be holy which must be more than being and doing good things!
- What if I asked you to give me an analogy that powerfully illustrates what it means to be holy; or maybe you could show me something in the vastness of creation that will guide my understanding of 'Holiness'? Nothing measures up does it?
- Before you lose heart, what about telling me what holiness *isn't*, so that whatever is left over will give me a clear picture of what it is! We'd be here til next week and still wouldn't have a clear definition!

My word! "Holy" – we sing it, speak it and read it hundreds upon hundreds of times in the bible but we can't nail down what it is!

So my question is: How can you be holy as the Lord calls you to be if you can't put your finger on what being holy is? Or is this one of those times that words can't explain what the heart just knows?!

Here's my best effort to describe for you what 'Holy' means.

- A. The ultimate source of holiness is God and not human.
- B. It's the total otherness of a Holy God that engages us in a fearful and wonderful mystery.
- C. Holiness belongs to the being and activity of God – everything God is and does.
- D. Like life itself – holiness is both a power that God can give to make people or things holy and it is a state of being, like when we say or sing, "God is holy."¹

I know! What an inadequate description! And yet there is a **wonderful** reason behind it all...

2. This wonderful truth is: God purposefully set things up this way.

He did it because holiness is not something God intended for dictionary definitions. Holiness isn't something for us to read **about** in books or talk **about**.

¹ Kleinig, JW, 2003, Concordia Commentary, pg 5

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Holiness is something that God wants you, this church and the world to EXPERIENCE through personal contact and encounter with your Holy God.

Leviticus centres on the fact that your God – who is Holy – wants to be present amongst His people in a special and unique way. So Leviticus paints a picture of the structures required for sinful and unholy people to encounter that which is holy and clean *without dying in the process*.

Through these structures [animal sacrifices for sin and guilt along with various ceremonial requirements] – which are a bit like a safety barrier, God invites sinful and unholy people to come and participate in the holiness of His presence.

A place where God speaks His words of instruction and blessing into their lives, renewing and cleansing people, but also making them holy [which the bible calls sanctification].

God takes ordinary people and makes them holy – but he also takes it a step further than the holiness of individuals.

3. God makes people holy for the blessing and protection of the faith community.

People made holy are called to live according to what they've been given:

- Holy people don't show partiality no matter what people's circumstances are [rich or poor, lowly or great], but are called to treat everyone fairly and with a measure of mercy.
- God requires that Holy people won't spend their days in gossip, slandering the character of another, but will be grace-filled and encouraging in their words.
- He expects that the church won't be characterized by hatred for each other – that has no place in the community of faith, but that his people will love each other from the heart and serve each other's best interests.
- God requires that you don't long for any kind of personal payback – whether carried out or harboured in your thought life. He wants to see His people at prayer and repaying evil with good.
- People made holy will strive to avoid sins of the flesh; instead presenting their bodies as instruments of righteousness.

Why do you think God has these expectations?

Because when you live in open rebellion to God's expectations, you desecrate what God has made holy. ***Imagine that*** – what flows from your heart and rolls off your tongue and every kind of sinful act desecrates you and makes you unclean.

Desecration takes something that is holy and clean and pollutes it (desecrates) so that it becomes unclean and unholy and unrighteous. What impact does that have on you – let alone the whole community? ***It wreaks havoc!***

It often leaves in its wake people who go through their entire lives feeling desecrated, unclean, unholy and unworthy of the grace of God. *That's not what God wants.* (watching?)

He doesn't want it for those who have been sinned against and he doesn't want it for those who have sinned against God, against themselves and against others.

4. What God wants is to restore and renew people for himself!

What about your life – is it in need of renewal and cleansing from God?

- If you're honest, have your words and actions desecrated the temple of the Holy Spirit – which is your body?
- Have your words and actions impacted others?...

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Soap, detergent and constant scrubbing can't clean off the effects of sin can it? Only God can do that!

In Leviticus this happened through animal sacrifice, ritual washings and structures God set up to provide for His people.

But for those who turn to Christ - **you are recipients of a new and better covenant.**

A covenant sealed not with the blood of animals, but with Jesus holy and precious blood!

Apart from Jesus who (tabernacled) among us, God's call to holiness is unattainable. But for you who believe in Jesus Christ and look to Him for help – all things are possible.

- Through the cross Jesus bore for you every act of desecration;
- every word that slanders character or condemns,
- he bore the weight of your hatred as nails were driven into his flesh;
- the God who didn't vow payback willingly bore the stench of an unclean people.

Jesus cleanses unclean people. Jesus makes you clean.

The promise of Leviticus 19:1-2 – *"you will be holy, You shall be holy, you are holy"* is fulfilled and applied to your life through Jesus Christ today.

The cross has literally changed your life!

Paul says,

'... you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. (1 Cor 1:30)

5. So we can't define holiness – that's okay.

We know through Jesus sacrificial love, (through the mystery of your baptism) we have a share in His righteousness and holiness that we would never know apart from Him.

So it's out of pure joy and gladness we respond to Him in prayer and in songs of praise and as we *strive to live as in God's presence, to live holy lives – even as Christ has made us holy.*

- We can't define it, but God's holiness leads us to respond to Him and to love him as Jesus said, *'with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind.'*
- We can't define it, but we know that participating in God's holiness manifests itself as we live in community *'loving your neighbour as yourself'*.
- It increases the love that we have for one another and how we interact with each other as a holy priesthood.
- God's holiness protects you from evil.

Beyond you and the people around you today, God's holiness is the generator of your love for people beyond the boundaries of this church!

So are you energized for mission...or not? ***Why might that be if you're not?***

Maybe you're even wondering who your neighbour is or where to start?

There was a young lawyer who asked Jesus this same question in the parable of the good Samaritan.

Jesus answer was as clear then as it is today:

Anyone who is in need – no matter who they are. That's your neighbour!

Its people here around you in the church who have all kinds of needs you are aware of; but it's equally the people you run into through your week. Jesus is calling you to see them as your neighbour too.

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Ask God to show you the need – he will!

- *Who do you know that is in need of the renewal, cleansing and forgiveness available in the name of Jesus? Contact them this week.*
- *Who do you know that would benefit being in the presence of the Lord your God – just like you've been today? Anyone? Reach out to them, be practical – remember God has gifted and equipped you to serve with what you have.*
- Have you invited them to the Longest Lutheran Lunch?
- Ask God for help. He does answer prayer!

6. Today, in worship, in the word, you've been sharing in the holiness of God who shows up to teach, bless and renew you!

That's because holiness isn't about definitions or knowledge.

It's about God who is alive - acting and working in your life!

Holiness is something that God wants you and the world to EXPERIENCE through faith in Jesus Christ.

I pray that you would have a renewed desire for worship, encountering the Holy and living God;

- to be in the word
- and to confess in the sure knowledge that God will continue to renew you, forgive you and call you to live as His justified, sanctified and Holy Spirit filled disciples in the world.

Amen.

Pray: Holy God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thank you that you do wonderful things for us as we gather in your name and in your holy presence for worship. Thank you that you sanctify your people – that you make each person here holy and call them to live each day in your presence and with a sense of the importance of your call. Help us to open your word each day, to know the power, protection and blessings you fill us with. Lord give us willing hearts that worship you with gladness - everyday. In Jesus' name, Amen.