

## Happiness in Holiness – Who is our Neighbour?

Leviticus 19:1-4, 18, 32-37 by Patty Friesen(Aug 6/17)

In Osler, we've been going through the Old Testament since January and it's been a wild ride through the crazy families of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the complaining Israelites in Exodus. We appreciated Cindy's sermon on Esther and teaching us about Purim. We've wrestled with the holy wars in Judges with Deborah and Jephthah. There's never a dull moment in the Old Testament until we get to Leviticus – then it gets really dull.

I know some of us are tired of the Old Testament but if I can just get through the next three Sundays with Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, I can say that I've preached through the Torah - the first five books of Moses. Who is crazy enough or bored enough to read the book of Leviticus besides me?

Ian Frazier, for one. His Leviticus experience inspired a delightful book of essays called *Lamentations of the Father*. Let me read a short section entitled "Laws for Children When at Table."

If you are seated in your high chair, or in a chair such as a greater person might use, keep your legs and feet below you as they were. Neither raise up your knees, nor place your feet upon the table, for that is an abomination to me. Yes, even when you have an interesting bandage to show, your feet upon the table are an abomination, and worthy of rebuke. Drink your milk as it is given you, neither use on it any utensils, nor fork, nor knife, nor spoon, for that is not what they are for; if you will dip your block in the milk, and lick it off, you will be sent away. When you have drunk, let the empty cup then remain upon the table, and do not bite it upon its edge and by your teeth hold it to your face in order to make noises in it sounding like a duck; for you will be sent away.

When you chew your food, keep your mouth closed until you have swallowed, and do not open it to show your brother or your sister what is within; I say to you, do not so, even if your brother or your sister has done the same to you. Eat your food only; do not eat that which is not food; neither seize the table between your jaws, nor use the raiment of the table to wipe your lips. I say again to you, do not touch it, but leave it as it is. And though your stick of carrot does indeed resemble a marker, draw

not with it upon the table, even in pretend, for we do not do that, that is why. And though the pieces of broccoli are very like small trees, do not stand them upright to make a forest, because we do not do that, that is why. Sit just as I have told you, and do not lean to one side or the other, nor slide down until you are nearly slid away. Heed me; for if you sit like that, your hair will go into the syrup. And now behold, even as I have said, it has come to pass.

Who is crazy enough or bored enough to read the book of Leviticus? Jesus was. Yes, Jesus was familiar with Leviticus. So much so, in fact, that when a religious leader asked him about the greatest command Jesus affirmed the epic line from Deuteronomy about loving God with heart and mind and strength. And then straight out of Leviticus he tacked on a bit about loving one's neighbour as oneself. Perhaps you connected these two scriptures as well when Leviticus 19.18 was read aloud. Amazing, Deuteronomy supplemented with Leviticus. Amazing, the command to love God linked with love of neighbour.

Who is crazy enough or bored enough to read the book of Leviticus? Hopefully us, for it points us in a good way. The holiness of God is a major concern within Leviticus. 150 times in Hebrew does the root word for holiness appear as a noun, verb or adjective (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr, "Book of Leviticus" in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary (v1 1)*, p. 985). Four times we are told to be holy because God is holy (11.44, 11.45, 19.2, 20.26). The concerns of God and Jesus about our holiness are serious business because we represent the holy things whose names we carry. God cared about the way the Israelite's looked after the poor because the Hebrews were his chosen people, his ambassadors. Jesus cared about the way the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews responded to their neighbours because people were drawn to or driven away from God by the manner in which they treated their neighbours.

Our congregations meet on Treaty 6 land this morning and our neighbours are still aboriginal. We appreciate the 40 years of relationship building Leonard Doell has built

with our aboriginal neighbours and he has some reflections on how we also can enter into this relationship building. Leonard...

In Leviticus holiness is not about perfection. Holiness is about intent, about embracing our role as a called people, about trying our best and then patching up our shortcomings. In this spirit then, let us be holy for the Lord our God is holy. And in communion, may Christ make us into a forgiven and redeemed people.

Vern Retzlaff from Aberdeen Mennonite will lead us.