

Texts: Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18, Matthew 5:38-48

Have you noticed, these days, that there are a lot of people who are just out for themselves? They walk, they drive, they talk, they think and act as if they are the only ones in the world. The way some pedestrians cross the street. I was thinking about this as a launching point for my sermon, while walking through a hospital lobby, through the area where the elevators are. Remember how people used to, as a courtesy, walk along the right side of the corridor? Or look before walking across a common area where others are passing? Or even notice that others are present? No more – it's everyone for themselves! It's like many people now live within a small self-absorbed bubble. Lots of those people out there!

The scriptures this morning draw up an entirely different picture. Step outside the small, self-absorbed bubble. Widen your awareness, purposely broaden the attention you devote to the lives of others. Simple acts of outward care are commanded in Leviticus. Leave some crops in the field, for those who are hungry. Don't hoard it all for yourselves, or your own family. Think beyond your own family, your own group, your own nationality, your own race, and religion. Widen the circle, outward. Don't steal or deceive or lie; honor truth. Such self-centered impulses seriously damage the public good. Don't insult or cut-off those who are differently challenged. And, get off your high-haunches, Mr. or Ms. Superior. Don't hold onto grudges, or seek revenge; don't try to get back at someone who's done you wrong. Let those self-absorbed desires go; you are not the center of the universe. Instead, practice outward extensions of love, agape love which my friend, Randy Campbell, preached about last week.

This section in Leviticus, chapter 19, begins with this overarching, general command to the entire community of Israelites: "You must be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy." We may hear those words being spoken to us individually, but, in the Biblical context, they are spoken to the group, the collected persons, the community. The community, the whole wide circle, is to be holy, like the Lord our God. Walk and talk and think and stay on the right side, for the good of the whole. Don't get in the way; don't block the flow of good. Later in the chapter, it is recorded, you must love the immigrant as yourself, because you were once immigrants (our western show will remind us of that fact). Love your immigrant neighbor, as brother, sister: you must be holy. And 32 years ago, a group of people went and called this circle of collected persons: The Holy Way. Uh oh, that's our name.

Jesus expands it further, giving more pointers on resisting inwardly-focused preoccupation with self. If someone slaps you on the cheek, don't sweat it, offer the other one too. (The carpenter builds a bridge, not a wall, as Jocabed taught the kids last week.) If someone wants your shirt, give them your coat, too. Go the extra mile. It's not about what seems good for you alone; give your daily outward offering to the common good. It's **never** been about loving your neighbor and hating your enemies. Love your

enemies; there's no border on the love map. No person is beyond agape love. Grow your spirit and compassion to love persons who are difficult to love. Don't worry, they'll find you: God will send such persons to us. It's a God thing, a holy thing; you **must** be holy. Love, and grace, and hesed radiate outward from God like the sun in the morning shines on good and bad. Push love's outer limits. Don't cross love's path; go with its flow.

Why the holy way? Why not the easy way, as a name? Why not the safe way? Why not the go along with the self-absorbed flow of the rest of the world way? Why not the my way church? The Holy Way. Expanding outward attentive care for others. Expanding the circle of love and compassion, no borders. To youth and children. To hungry and homeless. To Natives and immigrants. To our Muslim friends. To our sisters and brothers in Agua Prieta and Chiapas, Mexico. We **must** be holy, as the Lord our God is holy.

Where other translations read – You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect – at the end of Matthew 5, the Common English Bible has: “Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete.” We are completed by, we are whole, we are holy, not by focusing on ourselves. We find our wholeness, and our holiness, as we stretch outward. Loving. Welcoming. Embracing others, not just sames. Even enemies. Don't take that tempting shortcut to serve only self. There are no such shortcuts on The Holy Way.

There was a time, a few years ago, I got a call at home on a Friday night. One of our members, who was driving by the church, saw the flashing lights of sheriff and border patrol vehicles out here in our dirt parking lot. She turned her car around, pulled in, and checked out what was happening. There had been a car chase; a pursuit by the border patrol and sheriff of a van carrying undocumented immigrants. In order to evade those authorities, the driver of the van apparently thought he saw an open shortcut through our church property, through the dirt parking lot, between the brick corner of the Ranch House and the outside wall of what is the women's restroom. The van crashed into this building, damaging the outside wall of the women's restroom. Fortunately, to our knowledge, no one was injured in the crash. I like to say that the driver of that van discovered what we who are The Holy Way have learned as God's faithful people: there is no shortcut on The Holy Way. There is only one long holy way. Love those who are challenging, difficult, demanding, for so does the Lord Jesus. Practice daily generous and attentive compassion for others, giving particular attention to those who are without, those who are left out, those who are misjudged, discounted, or forgotten. They are all on the love map. Be the holy way; no shortcuts. “Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete.”