

Love
Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18; Matthew 5:38-48
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Holiness is love.

When I think of holiness, I don't think of love. I think of a tight lipped better than thou person. I think of someone who is judging the rest of the world for not being as holy as they are. Literally looking down their nose at those of us who just aren't quite as good as them.

In Leviticus 19 God says, "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy." Then the rest of the passage describes how to love others- leaving food for others and caring for neighbor. To be holy is to love.

Jesus speaking to his disciples on the Mount talks of loving even one's enemies- people who have intentionally hurt you. God blesses both the good and the bad, and to be like God we also must love as God does. To be holy is to love.

In movies from time to time there is a villain who is difficult to love. Many times we find the back story of how the villain became the way they are. That helps me open my heart to them. The Grinch for example- In the 1966 television featurette. We don't really know why the Grinch is the way he is other than that maybe "his heart was 2 sizes too small." We do know that he's a mean one. But in 2000 and in 2018 movies of the Grinch, some of the story is filled in and I know my heart grew more compassionate towards him as I learned of his heartbreak.

It is hard to love some people. But maybe we limit ourselves by our very definition of love. We don't have to feel a warm fuzzy feeling to "love" someone. We have to live out love as a general rule, and great if our love falls on those we find difficult to love.

So even before I knew that the Grinch had been abandoned and heart broken, to be holy and to make God proud, if he was my neighbor, I would need to be kind to him and look out for his needs.

Love is an action. Love looks out for the wellbeing of others. Love looks out for the Shalom of all. Peace and Justice.

When I think of a holy person, with love defining holy, I think of Jimmy Carter. He is now 98 and receiving hospice care at his home. His grandson said about Jimmy and wife Rosalynn Carter, "They are at peace and - as always- their home is full of love." He was building homes with Habitat even in his late 90s. He has lived a life of service to all.

He always seems to be joyful too. Joy and holiness is another combination that surprises me. Holiness is not dour and boring. Holiness is the joyful act of loving service.

Jimmy Carter spent years battling diseases. Nicholas Kristoff, journalist from Oregon and humanitarian himself, said that "Jimmy Carter has improved more lives over a longer period than just about anybody in the world today."

Love is holiness. Love is service. Love for all.

Let us pray:

Lord, we long to love like you taught us. Help us to use our actions to show the world that we are yours, that like you we love and bless everyone with our actions. Amen.

