

**Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,
show us how to serve
the neighbors we have from you. Hymnal 1982 602**

This hymn is a prayer. A prayer asking Jesus to show us the way to serve. From today's lessons, we hear again how rules, how commandments are meant, intended to put us in a posture of returning God's love to God, ourselves and our neighbors.

What are your rules?

Family rules

Life rules

Work rules

Citizen rules

Brush your teeth

Do your homework

Call your mom

See your doctor

Go to church

Give 10 %

+ + +

I remember learning to read and spell at a time when phonetics was the prescribed way of teaching -- this was before whole word/whole language method.

The phonetic rules of how letters sound, what letters travel together, was memorized in rhyme and phrase:

Vowels A E I O U and sometimes Y and W.

When 2 vowels go walking the first one does the talking.

I before E-- except after C and when it sounds like the A as in neighbor and weigh.

Those rules did help me learn to read and I find that when spelling I frequently still recall them. Although these rules always have exceptions.

Commandments can seem a bit like that -- rules that help narrow my focus and then help me decide/decipher decisions.

For our spiritual ancestors the Israelites, those wandering Hebrews it was not much different.

After all the first 5 books of the Bible, the Torah, the law, show the importance of the rules. The rules, the commandments given by God, defined Israel as a faith community, as the people of God. There are a lot of rules, 613, along with a couple of variations of the ten commandments.

This gets boiled down in to the couple of verses in Leviticus, that we read today 'You shall be as God created you' – holy!!!

This sounds either way too easy or way too difficult.
Because if I am holy, you are holy and so are ALL others.

what about those with whom I disagree--holy
what about those who scare me-- holy
come from other places - holy
what about those who look different, act different, think differently-- holy
believe differently -- holy
Everyone is holy in God's eyes, everyone even if we don't agree.

This is the truth of the commandment to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself – in applying this rule of life our minds are blown, our attitudes are adjusted, our ability to listen increases -- we are converted.

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The psalmist said, 'Happy are they who delight in the law',
in other words, happy are they who honor God's holiness in ourselves and others.

This is Jesus' answer to the Pharisees in the Gospel - holiness is found in the law - that is ...
loving God and your neighbor.
Loving ourselves and one another is holy behavior,
Befitting all holy ones.

In Luke's Gospel, this little interchange between the Pharisees and Jesus is followed by
Jesus' telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan –answering the persistent question 'who
is my neighbor.'
Or
who is holy?

You see how quickly this gets even more complicated, even unsettling--when we consider the
word holy as another word for neighbor.

We find ourselves like the Pharisees trying to figure out a loophole, attempting to negotiate a
way around God's love for us and all people and our response to being loved by trying to
limit God's designation of holy. There must be an exception. Not here.

Denying holiness in ourselves and in others is sin.
That is the real consequence of not following this reimagined commandment, the risk is
separation from God, from our neighbors and even from ourselves.
Who we see as our neighbor is directly connected to how we understand the commandment –
the rule to love... God, self, neighbor.

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I have a love -- hate relationship with rules. I love rules when they support what I believe and value. I don't care for them when they seem to challenge what I believe or value.

I have been known to speed when I'm in a hurry, not use the cross walk when it is inconvenient, often I do not shake before opening. I also may, when desperate, eat yogurt past the expiration date, and more frequently than I like to admit I disregard signs that I think do not apply directly to me. I've also developed a full set of explanations and or excuses for why I can and do break the rules.

Dangerously, this also applies to who I deny as holy.
I believe I share these tendencies with the rest of humankind.
That is way I, why we, need to be reminded of our holiness. And our call to love.
Over and over.

Of course, we can disregard the commandment --but at serious risk.

When we lose sight of our call to love, when we forget we are loved, beloved of God. Then fear, self-protection, anger despair overtake us and holy becomes harder and harder to see. In neglecting our relationship with God and others we fall prey to creating God in our image rather than seeing we are created in God's image. Holy.

Loving God and neighbor and self-sets up a challenge in all times and in places. Yet it is a guideline that solidly stands against the lethargy of the status quo and cynicism of disease. It is, as it has been and will be forever --a needed and necessary refrain. A rule worth memorizing.

Jesus as one called beloved was sent out to heal and redeem, always reminding the people who listened about this holy relationship and its power to change the world.

In that same spirit of hope and healing let us as beloved of God return to God the love God gives -- with all our hearts, soul, and minds and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

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