



still waters

home church studies

Psalm 119.33-40 [Worship]

33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end. 34 Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. 35 Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. 36 Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain. 37 Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways. 38 Confirm to your servant your promise, which is for those who fear you. 39 Turn away the disgrace that I dread, for your ordinances are good. 40 See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.

Consider:

[Words]

Paul sees that his congregation in Corinth is messed up because of arrogant pride among its members. The know-it-alls were perhaps zealous experts in the role of the church in society or in mission strategy. Maybe they had an axe to grind for the budget. Perhaps they were seeking to control according to their special insight or competence. All are common maladies in the church. Against that temptation to pride, Paul insists that all “belong to Christ” (vs 23). Belonging to Christ means to submit all of one’s “wisdom” to the gospel of self-giving love, a theme of Paul in the more famous chapter 13. The point is succinct in Corinthians 8:1: “Knowledge puffs up but love builds up.”

The reading in Leviticus calls us to “be holy” in a way that is commensurate with God’s own holiness (verse 2). The call is to a self-conscious difference in conduct, attitude, and life style. While Leviticus is filled with rules for holiness, many of which we commonly judge to be problematic in the extreme, our reading leads to the conclusion that authentic holiness, commensurate with God’s own holiness, consists in generous attentiveness to the poor (verse 10) and getting one’s mind off one’s self for the sake of the neighbor (verse 18). The call is away from self-preoccupation and from punctilious scruples often associated with “holiness” and toward the needs of the neighborhood. The psalmist prays that God would “give life” (119:37, 40). Abundant life is given to those whose conduct is in sync with the good purposes of God.

Matthew’s gospel is a summons to another kind of life. Jesus again radicalizes the old commandments. The old command is to limit vengeance to what is symmetrical (“eye for eye”), but Jesus breaks the cycle of vengeance by forbearance. Whereas Leviticus commands “love of neighbor,” Jesus pushes to “love your enemy.” Clearly the people around Jesus walk to a different drummer, in a generosity and graciousness that defies a world of fear and anger and hate. – Walter Bruggemann

[Scripture] Leviticus 19.1-2, 9-18

1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

9 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God. 11 You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. 12 And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD. 13 You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. 14 You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. 15 You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. 16 You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the LORD. 17 You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. 18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Reread

Matthew 5.38-48 & 1 Corinthians 3.10-11, 16-23
