

A Gentle Reminder
Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

Have you ever needed a gentle reminder? Have you ever needed to be reminded of things? Reminded of how to behave. Reminded of things you promised. Reminded of what you said you'd do. Have you ever needed a gentle reminder? Being in a marriage, I get gentle reminders all the time. I said I'd do the dishes. I said I'd pick up my clothes or fold the laundry. Sometimes I need those gentle reminders to get me to do the things I said I'd do. You get gentle reminders at work. Gentle reminders to get a project done on time, to get a report filed when needed, to follow the safety protocols. Gentle reminders. They are there so that we can remember what we are supposed to be doing. They are given to us not to be mean, not necessarily to shame or scold us, but to politely push us back on the path we said we'd be on. They are given to politely correct our behavior. Gentle reminders.

Well, we see in the Leviticus today some gentle reminders for the people of God. I think they worth hearing today because just like in life, just like in our relationships, we need gentle reminders in our faith life as well. We need gentle reminders to live according to God's word, according to his will, according to his plan. We need gentle reminders of his Law, the perfection it demands of us. You will notice there is not any striking or smiting in this passage from Leviticus, just a gentle reminder of how God's people are supposed to live. Now, before we get into what those standards are for us, I want to gently remind you what the book of Leviticus is all about. It's the third book in the Torah and it follows the book of Exodus. Exodus is the story of God's people escaping slavery in Egypt to head toward the Promised Land. Their journey through the wilderness brings them to Mount Sinai where we hear the Law of God given. At Mount Sinai is where we are given the Ten Commandments. It is where we are given the specifics on the Tabernacle, God's house, should look. There are these new laws that are given that demand God's people to live another way, a different way than the rest of the world. These laws make them holy, set apart kind of people from the cultures that surround them.

At the end of Exodus, Moses tries to enter into the Tabernacle, the place where God dwells, but he can't. He can't because he's not holy. He can't because he isn't perfect. It's a gentle reminder of the separation between him and God that he cannot enter into his presence. So the book of Leviticus is filled with laws and rituals and ceremonies that gently remind the people of God's holiness and also make them holy and clean before God so that they can approach him. The book of Leviticus is a reminder of God's law, given at Sinai. The book of Leviticus is a gentle reminder of what perfection looks like. It is a constant reminder of how far we fall short of that standard. So our reading comes from that push to be holy. It is a gentle reminder of how we are to behave. People skip over Leviticus all the time because they think it is dated and not fit for the 21st century but those skeptics would be wrong. Today's reading is a pretty socially conscious message for today. It reminds us to care for the poor. It reminds us that we should be righting the wrongs that persist in the structures of power. It reminds us to defend the lives and livelihoods of the weak. It reminds us to love others like we love ourselves.

So today's reading is centered on this reminder to love, to care, to step outside of your own skin and recognize the needs of your neighbor. It's a reminder that life isn't all about you. It's a gentle reminder that God calls us to care for other people. It's a gentle reminder that other people need us. These words are written because we need the reminder. We need the reminder to look beyond ourselves because we often have our blinders on in life. We have our own agenda, our own schedules that keep us from really seeing the needs of others. So when God interrupts our lives with his word, he gently reminds us that there are other people besides me. There are other people in the world that need love. There are other people that need love and consideration. There are wrongs that need to be righted. There are injustices that need our attention. And if only you would love these folks like you love yourself then things would go well. Life would look different. The world would be a lot better place. It's a gentle reminder to be a holy people set apart to care for the world. It's a gentle reminder for us and we need it because we are selfish. We need it because we are about self preservation, looking out for number one. We care mainly about ourselves. Our default mode is "what about me?". God

snaps us out of this selfish existence and shows us that there are others that need our love. There are others that need our care. There are other people that need our attention and we sin whenever we ignore the call to help.

There is another gentle reminder in this passage that is given three times. Three times God gives us a gentle reminder about who He is in the midst of the demands he has for our lives. Did you notice them? Did they stick out to you as you heard them read? Did it mean anything for you? Let me read these significant words again so that you might be gently reminded who our God is for us, each and every day, regardless of what we remember and what we forget. The first paragraph ends this way: "For I the LORD your God am holy." The second two end repeating a similar refrain: "I am the LORD." This isn't supposed to be a fiery reminder of His power that can crush you the moment you step out of line. That is not what God is doing here. He is gently reminding them, in the midst of his correction, in the midst of their sinful wandering, that He is and continues to be their God. LORD is in all capital letters because it is a substitute for God's name, which is too holy for the Hebrew scribes to even put on paper. So, instead of writing God's name they wrote LORD in all capital letters. The name that LORD evokes is Yahweh. God is gently reminding them of his personal name that has been given to his children to cherish and venerate. This isn't just a name, it's a title, it's a reminder of what God has done for them. It's kind of like when your parents would gently remind you that they were your parents. Or how we remind our spouses or siblings that we are in that relationship with them. I'm your dad, I would never do anything to hurt you. I'm your husband, I will always love you. I am Yahweh, remember all that we've been through together? Or have you forgotten?

I am the God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush. I am the God who freed you from your oppressors in Egypt. I am the God who gave you a system of laws to protect each other from sin. I am the God who has led you through the Red Sea while drowning your enemies in it. I am the God who has led you through the treacherous wilderness to this holy mountain. I'm the God who promised deliverance through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I am the God who will lead you to the Promised Land. I am the God who keeps my covenants with my people even when they falter. I have been here since the beginning. I will be here through your pain. I will be waiting for you on the other side of death. I was. I am. I will always be. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I am all of these things for you and as you struggle your way through life and fail repeatedly at being holy, this is a gentle reminder that I will continue to be that God for you, always. It's my gentle reminder to you because you've clearly forgotten. You've forgotten all that I've done for you and it breaks my heart.

We hear this reminder today and it brings to memory so much more that God has done. We know a fuller story than those encamped at Mount Sinai. God's protection and provision went with the people, carried down through generations, embodied in Jesus. He has preserved his people throughout history. He became human at Bethlehem, born in a manger to bring hope to the world. He lived a perfect life, bringing about the Kingdom of Heaven in Jesus. He died a perfect death, suffering a punishment that was meant for us on the cross. He overcame death three days later as he walked out of his burial tomb on Easter morning. He ascended into heaven with the promise that he will return again. His church hasn't been overtaken by the powers of hell. He has promised that more is to come and we can know for certain it is because of these gentle reminders of what he has done for us. For He is the LORD. He is our God. He is holy and mighty and powerful and compassionate and merciful. His love for us knows no bounds and his care of the world is enacted through us as he gently reminds us to love one another.

This is the God we trust in. This is the God we lean on. This is the God who saves us. This is the God who sent his only Son to save the whole world. This is the God who wants to be known to the rest of the world. He makes himself known through the church. He makes his story and power and mercy known through you and me. That's why he gently reminds us to live this way. This is why he urges us to be known as the most compassionate, the most humble, the most merciful, the most just, the ones who are most willing to forgive and serve and love. He calls on us to live this way so that others may be taught or gently reminded of

who God truly is for them. It's an awesome power and responsibility that he gives to us. So we live and move and serve and love in response to who God is for us. He is the LORD. He is our light and our salvation. He is gently reminding us of that today. So we don't need to be scared or nervous as we step out to represent him. We don't have to be fearful or hesitant as we seek to do his will. We have the LORD beside us, behind us, leading us. So let us love persistently, serve humbly, speak boldly, and stand courageously. This is our calling. This is our God. Hear the gentle reminder. Be gently reminded of all that He is. Be gently reminded of all that the world needs. Now gently remind the world. Gently show your neighbor. Amen.