

“Adulging”
Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18
Matthew 5: 38-48
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Mary Cunningham Gause

Matthew 5:38-48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is **perfect**.

Leviticus 19:1-2

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 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.**

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. 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.**

You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: **I am the Lord.** You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: **I am the Lord.** 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. 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.** You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. 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.**

Adulting. It is a more contemporary term that means to do grown up things and hold responsibilities such as, a 9-5 job, paying a mortgage/rent or car payment, or anything else that makes one think of grown-ups. In the last few years, social media platforms have taken to sharing tweets, photos and short sayings written by those who are encountering the realities of becoming an adult. Some of them are serious, many of them common sense, and thankfully most of the authors of such sayings recognize the humor and humility of life. Some examples of this Social Media “adulting phenomena are:

- Adulting: breaking the rules and eating chocolate cake for breakfast
- Just texted my Mom 8 times because I found all the lids for my Tupperware. Adulting.
- Well everyone, I just struggled for 10 minutes but finally got the fitted sheet on my bed. Adulting is hard.
- The best investment I’ve made this year is a bill organizer. Adulting y’all.
- Adulting means my weekend goals of staying in pajamas and not leaving my house have become the exact same punishments I hated as a child.

You get the idea. People summing up the realities of growing up and becoming adults and sharing the difficulties and joys. Today’s Scriptures are about Adulting but about the realities of growing up and becoming disciples – the realities of living as people loved and called by God.

The Leviticus passage jumps in with both feet and begins with a marvelous declaration that forms the foundation for the community of faith: The Lord says to Moses...tell the entire congregation of Israel (and by entire we understand that not only includes the congregation of Israel that would be present with Moses at the time of hearing these words...but also all who will come to be a part of the congregation of Israel...ever!

...“you shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy...” You shall be holy. That’s a plural you – in the South we say Y’all shall be holy. Y’all are holy. It is easy to understand God as holy...holiness IS God. Holiness means to be sacred or set apart. God is certainly that....but us? Really. Remember God chooses to be with us – chooses to live among us – and in doing so God is showing that God intends for us to be holy, too.¹ We learn in Genesis that God made us in

¹ Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 4; Leviticus 19:1-2;15-18 Barbara Brown Taylor, Westminster-John Knox, 2011. p195.

God's own image...and God has placed within us what we need to be able to do what God asks². To be holy recognizes that all one does is rooted...deeply rooted...in the understanding that because God is holy and calls us holy, *every single thing* that we do – every action we take should grow out of that holiness...out of that sacredness...out of that set apartness – that place that God calls us to. Being holy speaks to a way of living that infuses everything we do. If God is holy...and God creates us holy...then God intends for us to be holy in our actions and in our words. At work, with family, at the post office, at the grocery store, on the soccer field, at worship... Wherever we are; whatever we do; God sits with us – guides us and walks with us as we do our best to be Holy in all that we do.

For our Hebrew brothers and sisters, how one lived out that holiness meant loving those outside of your kin or family but still within your own tribe. Specifically, it meant leaving produce in the fields for the poor to glean; It meant speaking with neighbors honestly and directly; it meant paying workers fair and prompt wages. Loving one's neighbor meant ensuring neighbors had food, just wages and were treated with dignity.

So, when we take the Leviticus text, that understanding being holy and what it means to love ones neighbor...and then layer on the Matthew text, it brings a whole new and complex depth to the understanding of loving one's neighbor. For Jesus lays out that loving one's neighbor is more than loving those in our family or connected to our tribe...loving one's neighbor includes the people we do not know...but also those we consider our enemies.

Jesus illustrates this all throughout the gospels: he eats with the taxpayer Zacchaeus and stays at his house; he heals a man with leprosy; he touches the woman who bled for seven years and immediately she is whole; he teaches of a Samaritan – a tribe that was the enemy of the Israelites - as the only one who stops to help a seriously injured Jewish man. Through these and many other gospel accounts...Jesus broadens the definition of neighbor to move beyond the Israelite community to include Gentiles and ultimately all the children of God. But that's Jesus – he is God, of course he can love enemies. We are only human and loving everyone, loving enemies, well that's just impossible.

² Ibid

Author and pastor Frederick Beuchner offers a little help here: "...love is not primarily an emotion, but an act of the will. When Jesus tells us to love our neighbors, he is not telling us to love them in the sense of responding to them with a cozy emotional feeling. You can easily produce a cozy emotional feeling on demand as you can a yawn or a sneeze. On the contrary, he is telling us to love our neighbors in the sense of being willing to work for their well-being. Thus, in Jesus' terms, we can love our neighbors without necessarily liking them. This does not mean that liking may not be a part of loving, only that it doesn't have to be. Sometimes liking follows on the heels of loving. It is hard to work for people's well-being very long without coming in the end to rather like them too."³

Because we are holy...and because we love God, God calls us to love **all of** our neighbors and God knows doing so often involves taking risks. Jesus certainly stepped over social boundaries and offered love and grace to those that society deemed the least, the vulnerable, and unlovable. Jesus calls us to step up to that same challenge; He calls us out of our comfortable spaces and into places where we make ourselves vulnerable enough that we just may see the face of God in someone who is nothing like us; Loving our neighbor often puts us in places where we are forced to rely upon God and our neighbors, and that is scary. It most likely will challenge us in ways that run counter to the very society in which we live but by doing so God know we may be changed.

There is a story that was all over Social media recently about a man, John Dutcher, who hated all Muslims. Angered and reeling from the events of 9-11, he had a visceral, physical reaction each time he saw someone he thought was Muslim. But John lives in Omaha which houses one of the largest resettlement communities for refugees. John soon discovered that in his apartment building he had 6 refugee families – all of them Muslim – living around him. He was sick at first, but then slowly he got to know them. Through encounters with their children, opportunities to help them settle and meals shared together, John is now known to his Muslim neighbors as Brother John. They call him Brother John because he is always around to care and help his new friends and he has come a part of their family. The Lutheran services organization

³ Buechner, Frederick. Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC. Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1973. pp 64-65.

that helps relocate refugee families says they rarely get calls from the families they place in that area of Omaha...because if there are things they need, they go to John. ⁴

The challenge for all of us is to take that first step out of what is comfortable. It may mean a small step or it may be a giant leap...but be warned. Because once you do it...you just may find yourself so changed that you begin to look at the world differently...you may find yourself so changed that you begin to look at your neighbors differently. At the very least...you will widen your definition of neighbor and experience what it means to be holy.

I have no doubt that there are some in this world who will disagree with the idea that God calls us to love all of our neighbors. They may argue we are already doing enough for our neighbors; there may be some who believe there are always exceptions to the rule – some neighbors whom we just can't love. I have no doubt that there some of our neighbors are far more difficult to love than others. But as uncomfortable as it is ...I think God is pretty clear...we are to be holy in our love with all. Holy with the same indiscriminate love that God shows us. We don't have to understand that love and we certainly don't have to like our neighbor...but as disciples of Christ, as children of God, as the community of faith we are called to do it...to make sure our brothers and sisters, ALL of our brothers and sisters have food, have shelter, and are treated with dignity.

Friends – this is “Adulging.” It is doing the hard work...and thanks be to God that we are called to do it together.

All glory be to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

⁴ <http://www.ketv.com/article/change-of-heart-for-omaha-man-who-hated-muslims/8690536>