**SERMON 2-9-2020**

**LEVITICUS 26:1-13**

Sheila was a young woman who lived alone.

One day her washing machine stopped working properly.

She called the repairman.

He was booked up for the next 2 weeks, however, he had just received

          a cancellation for the next morning. Would that work for her?

She had to go to work the next morning,

          but she could leave the key under the doormat.

The repairman agreed that would work out OK.

"There is just one rule," she told him.

"My dog is big, and looks a little scary, but he won't bother you at all.

          However, you must not speak to the parrot."

"OK," answered the repairman.

“The dog is friendly, but I won't speak to the parrot.”

"That's right," she replied. "I only have the one rule: Do not speak to the parrot.

          If you get thirsty there is iced tea in the fridge."

“I'll have your washing machine fixed by the time you come home from work.”

The next morning the repairman arrived, retrieved the key from under the mat,

          and entered the house.

The dog was big, and very friendly. The parrot was in its cage in the corner.

The man started working on the washer, and the parrot started talking.

The dog sat down near the washer and watched the repairman.

The parrot continued talking,    and talking,       and talking.

Finally, the repairman couldn't stand it any longer.

He turned to the parrot and said, (with some frustration and anger):

“Would you just shut up!”

For several long moments there was absolute silence in the house.

Then the parrot said quite firmly: "Sic him, Bruno."

With bared teeth, and a guttural growl, the dog charged.

The repairman fled, leaving his tools behind,

          and slammed the door shut just before Bruno reached him.

Rules and laws don't seem very important if we miss the point behind them.

Some laws we simply don't understand, so how can they be very important?

The repairman discovered how important one rule can be.

When he broke that rule, in spite of his promise, he discovered how important

          obeying the rules could be.

The book of Leviticus is a law book,

          a procedural manual for getting along with a holy and powerful God.

Many well-intentioned readers, determined to read the Bible

          from beginning to end, bog down in Leviticus.

Yet Leviticus as a whole shows what kind of people

          God wanted the Israelites to be.

These laws affected everyday life.

Many of them show us how God wants us to live and act.

God's laws still have meaning for us today.

The laws show us how to live as God's people,

          and how to overcome the results of sin.

 The Israelites offered sacrifices to reestablish a right relationship with God

          after they had sinned and repented.

Through their sacrifices they expressed gratitude for what God had done for them.

Acceptance of the sacrifice signified acceptance of the one who brought it.

Their offerings gave the people an inner peace, a sense of forgiveness,

          a feeling of being right with God, and an awareness of his presence.

Then they could understand God's promise: I will walk among you,

          and I will be your God, and you shall be my people.

Today, we have difficulty understanding all the rules, and regulations,

          and commandments about sacrifices.

We begin to realize the importance of sacrifices when we remember the sacrifice

          Jesus paid for our sinfulness.

We no longer make individual sacrifices to atone for our sins.

Jesus paid the price once and for all.

Because of his gift of total forgiveness, out of gratitude

          we can begin to live as God's people, and live his way.

For many years surgery remained a desperate last resort for the hopelessly ill.

Surgeons knew nothing about germs.

Without washing, they would don operating garb,

          usually an old coat caked with blood and pus from numerous operations.

They would pick up the scalpel,

          wiped clean with an old rag after the last operation, and go to work.

Half of those operated on died.

Many women died during child birth.

One pioneer after another stumbled on the correct sterile techniques.

But each was scorned and humiliated by fellow doctors.

A few discovered that making doctors wash their hands

          could dramatically cut the death rate in maternity wards.

Yet most opposed this process strenuously.

Why were doctors so slow to adopt sterile techniques?

The answer is simple: germs had not yet been discovered.

Because they could not see germs they could not understand

          why washing hands could make a difference.

When germs were finally discovered with a microscope,

          sterile procedures began to make sense and the war on germs began.

Even so, each reform, from rubber gloves, to gauze masks,

          was accepted only grudgingly and with considerable opposition.

Doctors had a hard time remembering that something invisible

          could be so devastating.

Fifty years of constant education and reform were necessary before sterile

          technique became a routine part of surgery, and delivering babies.

Like the surgeons who could not understand the danger of germs, we often have trouble

finding meaning in God's laws and commandments.

What is the point of forgiving someone who hurt us?

Why should we feed the hungry?

Why do we have to love our neighbor?

Why should we pray?

Why should we follow God's laws and commands

          when we don't understand the meaning of them?

Simply because God is our God.

We are his people.

And God knows a lot more than we do.

By following him we can experience life more abundantly,

          filled with joy and peace, even when we cannot understand.

Leviticus, and actually, the whole Old Testament

          is not just a book for those who lived long, long, ago.

The Bible, all of it, is still relevant for us today.

Somethings we may never understand.

Some do not apply since Jesus died for us.

But all of it is helpful when we are seeking God's will for our lives.

Jeremy was just a young boy.

He and his parents were spending a week in the cabin by the lake.

The weather had been rainy and cold, but today was warm and sunny.

Jeremy wanted his Dad to take him out in the rowboat but Dad was busy.

He wandered down by the lake and looked longingly

          at the rowboat tied to the dock.

He knew he was not allowed to take the boat out on the lake all by himself.

But, what if he just sat in the boat for a few minutes?

Jeremy walked out on the dock and pulled the rope

          until the boat was against the dock.

And he climbed in, and sat down, and enjoyed the view.

Jeremy did not notice that although the boat was still tied to the dock,

          it was drifting away.

He tried to reach the rope, but couldn't.

So there he sat in the boat unable to pull it closer to the dock.

He couldn't swim, he couldn't reach the rope, and he could not get to the dock.

And so he waited. Patiently.

He knew Dad would come.

His father would get him out of the trouble he had gotten himself into.

It was a long wait, but Dad did come.

He pulled on the rope and brought the boat to the dock

          and lifted the shivering boy to safety.

Jeremy clung to his Father, and with tears running down his face, whispered:

“Thank you Daddy. I knew you would come.”

“Always," answered Dad. I will always come and get you.”

We often manage to get ourselves in some difficult situations.

But our Heavenly Father will come and help us – always.

The rules and laws and commandments are not a way to get to Heaven

They were given to us so we could live God's way, even when we do not understand.

These laws are not just so much dried ink in some dusty, old book

They describe how to live in a relationship with God.

It is our choice – and it can make all the difference in our lives and in the world.

AMEN