

October 27, 2019

Psalm 15 (New International Version)

1 Corinthians 6:19 (New International Version)

Love 301 “Can I Live Here: The Location of Holiness”

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Since the dawn of time, people have been trying to put God in a box. Take our own tradition, first there was the Tent of Meeting where it was thought God could be encountered. Then, it was decided God needed a bigger and better box, so the Temple in Jerusalem was built. Then, there was the building of local synagogues and then churches.

Whether it is within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or across the ocean or even to foreign lands we cannot help but notice we love to build a building for God, construct what we think will be fitting for holiness.

Sacred sites are preserved and revered because they help us feel closer to God (like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Church of the Beatitudes by the Sea of Galilee, Church of the Holy Nativity in Bethlehem, Taize Church of Reconciliation in France, Iona in Scotland, and St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome) to name just a few.

Despite all these shrines, churches and sacred places, which are built to help us feel closer to God, the psalmist informs us that we can be no closer to God than the values we uphold in our everyday lives. As inspiring as they are, visits to holy places (including church on Sunday morning) do not constitute real holiness or sacredness.

The Psalmist in Psalm 15 asks a piercing question regarding the residence of the holy: Who can dwell in your sanctuary? And who can live on your holy hill?

The answer is swift:
those who walk blameless,
who do what is righteous,
who speak from their hearts,
who have no slander on their tongues,
who do their neighbor no wrong.
Given that list, it almost makes you wish you hadn't asked.

A huge, stinging reminder, no!
that the essence of sacredness is not in a location,
but in a lifestyle.

We are the temple, our very bodies and this body of Christ called St. James United Church of Christ. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are not our own.

We are God's building, the container of the essence of God. Will we let God out of the box by letting God live through us, not just in us? Will we breaking God out when we love, show mercy and do justice. Will holiness be boxed in, not if we live out our faith. If we do more than worship on Sundays, rather honor God by what we do and how we do it and say it, and by what we don't say and do Monday through Saturday, then holiness will be seen, felt and experienced by everyone with encounter not just those who attend come to this boxed version of God.

When we live our faith in the love we share, in the service we give, and in the justice we promote, we never leave the holy places, because we personify them.

D. L. Moody once said, “A holy life will make the deepest impression. Lighthouses blow no horns, they just shine.”

Real holiness is determined:

by the **honesty** of our relationships,
 by the **justice** we promote in our communities,
 by the **respect** we express for others,
 and by using our **financial blessings** to help those in need.
 Let’s take them one by one and chew on them a bit.

Real holiness is honesty regarding our relationships.

In other words, in the pursuit of holiness we need to do periodic assessments and some self-reflection on how honest we are being with ourselves and others with whom we are in relationship. With whom do I now have conflict? What old things am I holding onto that impairs our relationship. How do I talk about you, and do I ever bad mouth you? Who do I need to ask for forgiveness? Who do I need to forgive? Am I seeing others as God sees them?

Real holiness is promoting justice in our communities. Which looks like:

- support for organizations that recognize inequality,
- showing solidarity across issues, communities and movements,
- being a strong ally who is conscientious of the language you use, your privileges, how deeply you listen, be vigilant and visible,
- taking risks by speaking out and taking action,
- deepening your critiques beyond the surface, look for unquestioned assumptions, identify and resist dominant narratives,
- getting to know your community,

- using your social media platforms to pose questions or to critique the limited ways equality and justice is being framed,
- running for office,
- paying attention to policies,
- sharing your skills and using your talents for the marginalized and oppressed.

Real holiness is respect we express for others by being mindful of how you communicate, demonstrating trust, being reliable and accountable, being kind, finding solutions not blame, and praising the work of others.

Real holiness is using our financial blessings to help those in need. 55.5% of American household give to charity. I wonder what get in the way for the other 44.5%? Giving to those in need is a central tenet of our faith and it is a moral obligation too. When living out this element of holiness it is important to do three things:

1. Make a planned giving plan, and give yourself some wiggle room, so you can be spontaneous with your giving now and then,
2. Determine what is a priority to you: the who, what, where and why of giving.
3. Stretch yourself in your giving. Give to the point where it will require you to have faith.
4. Re-evaluate every year to determine whether your circumstances have changed which would impact your giving or more often if you are going through a major life transition or life changing and altering event.

May we not only look to the cross when we sing, “Holy, Holy, Holy”, but also when we turn and look at one another.

