

Covenant UMC Bible Study Notes—January 29, 2018

for the Scripture readings for February 4

1 Peter 1:13-16, Leviticus 19:2-4

Personal holiness combined with service is our response to grace.

“Holy” in Hebrew is a positive concept, an inspiration and goal associated with God’s nature. Holiness means *imitation Dei*—the life of godliness. How can we best imitate God?

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People joining a United Methodist church promise to participate in its ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service, and their witness. This Sunday, we will focus on service.

John Wesley said there is no holiness without social holiness.

Holiness is an attempt to mimic the inspiration and holiness of God.

Holiness means “otherness.” (See Isaiah 6:1-5) God’s nature is to be other. Through holiness, we become rooted in another world.

Holiness means imitation of God. In the context of the church, to participate through service we must participate in a life of godliness. Today’s scriptures focus on linking personal holiness with service as our response to grace.

Leviticus 19:2-4: ritual and personal holiness

These words were addressed to the assembly—to all of Israel.

We’re feral. This is a precept. We are animal-like in our behavior. We are not to be feral. Cats have no concept of “other.”

There are other words, like sanctified—set aside to serve God. I can’t attribute holiness to myself. As soon as I say I’m holy, I’m not.

The word “holiness” has been used as a weapon.

Lots of words are like that. We need to call it something different. For example, I don’t say “grace,” but “mercy.” I’m big on mercy. It is the main attribute of God.

Holiness is not a personal achievement.

Why is a sense of holiness necessary to service? Service not embedded in holiness is a distortion of what you want to achieve.

If you have a project bathed in prayer, you need to look at it as a holy thing, not a task. It is not a benefactor/receiver relationship.

1 Peter 1:13-16

Girding is a metaphor. At Passover, the Jews girded themselves for action.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed. (Romans 12:2)

God is practical about this holiness stuff. When are we holy enough to serve?

The back side of the coin of holiness is idolatry. In Old Testament times, people cast gods out of metal. No one does that today, but we are idolatrous in our minds and actions.

The rich young ruler could not give up his possessions, like many today.

We make it so hard. In the presence of God, sinful stuff would fall away.

John Wesley was obsessed with his own salvation, afraid to die before he was saved. Then his heart was strangely warmed. He came up with a method of achieving salvation. Service to human beings is part of your faith journey. In the quest for salvation we must be of service to others. How do we approach service that is not condescending, service that is mutual? What if we lived spiritually poor, aching for salvation?

Humility is another precept.

Condemnation for things like smoking or drinking or what you wear can discourage a person into giving up the Christian life.

Jesus said to come to him as little children, innocent. It also means without any means to serve. We have to be filled. Come empty. We need to be replenished.

We need to rely on a process of sanctification by God, not on our supposed ability to achieve salvation.

Some words have acquired meanings different from their original meaning. We need new words. If we are speaking to someone from the holiness tradition, is “holiness” one of those problem words? Jesus said “be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36) and “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

As to being filled, people in recovery from addictions meet once or even twice a day. The reason for the success of Methodism wasn’t church once a week, but the small group meetings during the week, affording support, sharing, and accountability.

The United Methodist Women could write the book on service.

When women began going to work outside the home, there was less time to do things around the house. The church fell off the plate; it had to compete with activities. Life became an over-structured agenda. Nurturing done by women in churches is no longer done.

When Title IX came in, schools had to offer programs for girls equally as they did for boys. It was the beginning of a breakdown of stereotypes. How was this going to change our relationships? There was no help for young people figuring this out; we had to find our own way.

World War II was when women started working.

The other side of the coin is that now more women are living their faith out in the world. How can the church help them do this? This means a change of focus for the church.

We need to act on our gifts, not the role society puts on us. There are no gender-specific spiritual gift inventories.

We must base how we serve on individual gifts, not stereotypes on roles we should play. What ties us all together? What is the umbrella?

Mercy. I found the joy of the Lord when I understood that.

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Please join us for our next Bible Study on Monday, February 5, 2018, at 9:30 A.M., at Covenant United Methodist Church, 1124 Culver Road, Rochester, New York.