

Can you believe this weather?? There is nothing more spectacular than greater Vancouver on a gorgeous day. The skyline of buildings - those incredible engineering marvels that stand as sentinels to human ingenuity set against the backdrop of sea and mountains is breathtaking to me. One of my favourite places to be in all of Vancouver, is mid span on the Lion's Gate Bridge in grid lock traffic...I get to stop and see this incredible panorama. I feel like I'm about to go on a holiday every time I'm on the bridge - in grid lock traffic and when its freely moving. When I come north, I imagine all the wonderful vacation destinations on the north shore. When I head south on the bridge, I imagine being a tourist in my own place.

As hard as it was to come back from vacation and my sacred sanctuary in the south - with all of its natural beauty - I am blinded by the beauty that I get to come home to, and its spellbinding. Think of all the beauty and wonder that can be absorbed in this incredible juxtaposition - stunning natural beauty, and the brilliance of human creativity.

And then I was at the Vancouver Symphony last night. That orchestra is one of the finest orchestras I've ever heard. And it blows me away at how I get to sit in the dress circle, in this remarkable example of architectural history - the Orpheum - and hear a 22 year violinist play Bruch's violin concerto flawlessly, accompanied by the mystery of the VSO. Spellbound in wonder. Not kidding.

I'm sharing this because I'm standing here today in awe, complete awe, of the world that has been entrusted to us. And I invite you to be with me as you remember just one time in your life when your breath has been taken away by the generosity of life found in God's creation. Think of just one...and be there in that moment just for a moment. No words do it justice...right?

This has got to be the place from which the duality of the laws of the Hebrew Bible were first written - as contradictory as that might sound. One of the four original sources of the early Hebrew Bible, is called the "priestly" source; writings that likely had their origins in the worship life of the ancient Hebrews.

The mystics, the spirit people, the priests, who held the wonder of creation and the meaning of life on behalf of the community used ritual to help people practice and experience the holiness of the whole cosmic order....from the stars in the sky to the tiniest of creatures crawling on the earth. All life, was sacred.

To help people embody this wonder, this awe, this holiness, they developed rituals and practices to separate the holy from that which is unholy. To separate clean from that which was unclean. To separate order from chaos. (IN the first story of creation - the first day does this separating) To separate light from dark.

Ritual made real, the cosmic order in the human order. Keeping law, was the ritual that made people live in harmony. Literally, by participating in ritual and by keeping the holiness code, as an ancient Hebrew, you embodied the holiness of the cosmos, breaching heaven and earth the way God made it. The Ten Commandments - used in worship like we might say our new creed, or our Song of Faith, - were born from the belief that for humans to survive, they needed to live in order.

The problem, it sets up duality. In one hand, no other biblical theology sanctifies creation unequivocally. And the other hand, no other theology sets up the problem of duality so clearly. Good-Bad, Chaos-Order, Clean-unclean. Black-White. In-Out. You-me. The problem of duality? The laws of In and Out, Clean and Unclean is who gets to decide.

That's what Jesus saw. It may well have been what the lawyer wondered when he heard that Jesus was beginning to chastise the religious leaders. The holy awesomeness of the ancient Hebrew theology became entrenched. The religious leaders did the choosing. By the beginning of the first century, the leaders had become corrupt; they were the ones deciding what and who was clean and unclean, publicly, and contradicting those "rules" in their private lives.

I might imagine the lawyer asking a different but similar question - so Jesus, what does make a person clean or unclean. What makes a person holy or profane? What are the most important laws to do that? And masterfully, like all good biblical theologians, Jesus uses scripture to answer the question. He quotes the great Shema...from Deuteronomy Shema y'Israel! Hear O Israel...The Lord God is one...and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength. And then he quotes Leviticus - You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The scripture of the ancient Hebrew people, was speaking to the very contemporary reality of 1st century Palestine. Scripture still does that.

The lawyer went on to ask Jesus a follow up question: "who is my neighbor?" to which Jesus responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan. I have a follow up question for us this morning, out of all this scripture. How do we return to a real theology of the sacredness of all life, all creation, to the point where we behave differently because of it?

I wonder if it also has something to do with the way we love. What is it to love? I'd like to close with another parable...only its been recorded on YouTube. Let's watch.

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I think what makes us holy has to do with the quality of our loving. Amen.