



Living with LEVITICUS

March 24 • Traditional Worship

Our Pastors:
•Lead Pastor Andy Payton leadpastor@methodisttemple.church
•Associate Pastor JillAnn Knonenborg associatepastor@methodisttemple.church

Sunday Morning Volunteers:
•Ushers (3/24): Eric Eades, captain; Chuck Taylor, Ronnie Pursley, John Oberhelman, Margo Borre (balcony)
•Greeters (3/24): Tom Harvey, Margo & Skip Borre
•Ushers (3/31): Ushers Greg and Linda Stilwell, captains; Chuck Taylor, Jacque Hardin, Margo Borre (balcony)
Greeters (3/31): Tom Harvey, Margo and Skip Borre

*An usher remains in the Narthex during worship. Please reach out to them with any questions or special needs you may have. They are happy to assist!

Additional Information
•Prayer Concerns: The family of Nancy Henry in her passing; the family of Dick Wilson in his passing; Thornton Patberg; Rick Durgy.
•Today's Sanctuary flowers given by the Flower Committee to the glory of God.
•Today's choral selections are provided by the Temple Choir under the direction of Mark Schweickart. Organist: Barbara Waite. Temple Brass.

Order of Worship

- *Please silence all cell phones and other electronic devices.
*The cross (+) designates when the congregation will please stand.
*Worshippers who find standing difficult are invited to remain seated.

WELCOME "Gather Us In" by J. Honore

PRELUDE "Gather Us In" by J. Honore

CALL TO WORSHIP
Leader: From near and far, the Lord calls us together.
People: From east and west, north and south, the Spirit drives us toward community.
Leader: No one is a stranger in the Lord's house.
People: In the Lord's house, all are welcome.

*CHORAL INTROIT "The House of God" by Bob Burroughs

*CHIMES & SERVICES OF LIGHT

*FIRST HYMN UMH #127 "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

*PASSING OF THE PEACE
Leader: I see Christ in you.
All: And also in you.
Leader: Please turn to those around you and celebrate the presence of Christ.

CALL TO PRAYER
Leader: The Lord be with you.
People: And also with you.
Leader: Let us pray as one.

PASTORAL PRAYER/ LORD'S PRAYER
All: God our Reconciler, we call out to You as people who have trusted the wisdom of the world. We have prepared for war, thinking that will bring peace. We have built barriers, thinking that will keep us safe. We have degraded others, thinking that will bring us strength. Yet we find ourselves anxious, isolated from one another and from You. Help us to trust the wisdom of Jesus Christ, to put our hope in him alone. And now, O God, hear us as we pray in our own hearts and our own ways...

GIVING OFFERING "Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed" by R. B. Farlee

*DOXOLOGY the congregation stands as the Ushers return the offering to the Altar. #94 in Hymnal

ANTHEM "Must Jesus Bear the Cross with Lonesome Valley" arr. by Joseph Martin

KIDZ MOMENT

*SCRIPTURE READING
Leader: Praise God for the hearing of these sacred words.
All: Thanks be to God. Leviticus 19:33-34 (NRSV)

SCRIPTURE RESPONSE "The Family Prayer Song" by Morris Chapman

MESSAGE by Pastor Andy Payton Stranger

Good morning. Good morning everyone. Happy spring break into you right. It's a spring break. I can't believe it; it's crazy. I'm gonna sit, if there's a stool. I'm going to sit since we have like the hipster band sitting here. I'm gonna sit because I want to be like them. So I've got good news. I've got good news for you today. First, the good news is this Thursday I am flying to Albuquerque, New Mexico. I am going there to see a Franciscan monk, a Franciscan priest by the name of Father Richard Roar. I mean if you've been here in the last year, you've gotten a Richard Roar quote, comment, or something from me. Oh my gosh I'm so excited about going to see Father Richard Roar. I bought my tickets actually before Christmas a year about my tickets but now it's upon us. I get to go to Albuquerque, New Mexico. I've never been there. I get to go pray and be at a conference with Father Richard Roar, so wait until I get back. You think I'm coming in hot now. Wait till I come back from Father Richard Roar. I'm going to be wound up. So that's good news.

I've got some other good news. The good news is we're continuing our series on The Book of Leviticus. Right. Right. Don't get so excited. Oh my goodness. Control yourself. We're doing Leviticus! Today our theme is welcoming the stranger. It talks about alien in the text but welcoming the stranger is the theme. And here's some I want to throw out to you just from the beginning. Welcoming this stranger is like a means of growing up spiritually. Welcoming the stranger is a means of growing up spiritually or if not the means in which we grow up spiritually. When we're really reflecting the love of God, when we're really invested in that and we're serious about that, we're able to welcome people who think differently than us, look differently than us, act differently than us. When we're grown up spiritually, we're able to reflect that type of love. So that's what we're talking about a little bit today- welcoming the stranger.

Before we jump on in any deeper, let's begin with a moment to pray. Would you pray with me? God on this day help us to be present both to you and with you. Help us to be present to you in such a way that we realize that you're both with and within us. I pray that you would take the words in my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts and that you would work in such a way that they would be made to be acceptable in your sight. Indeed you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

So his name is Frederic Bittner. He's a Presbyterian pastor and theologian. He's written like 30 books over his lifetime. He's written countless essays and countless sermons. But he was once asked to summarize everything he was trying to say and when he summarized everything he was trying to say, teach, do as a minister, he gave one of the best quotes in my opinion of what the spiritual life looks like. So I'm going to share this with you. Then we're gonna move on from there. But here's Bittner's quote. He said if I were called to state in a few words the essence of everything I was tried to do, it would be something like this: listen to your life. See it for the mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain, excitement and gladness, touch, taste, smell your way to the holy because in the last analysis all moments are key moments in life itself is grace. I should probably read that; we could say a prayer and I'll be like go home and think about that. In the end, life itself is grace. For me the power of that idea is that grace is not like this add on. Grace is not this add on that we get later on in life. It's not like we measure up and so we adjust our behaviors and then we get grace. It's not like we figure it out. It's not like we get our theology straight and then we get grace. If Bittner is right, we are given grace from the very moment that our hearts begin to beat. We are given grace from the very moment that we're given the gift of life. If Bittner is right, everything is spiritual. Everything becomes spiritual. This is Hebrew tradition. This is Old Testament tradition 101. Think about Moses. Just for a moment when Moses asked God what God's name is, what does God say? I am. I'm existence of self, Moses. And it's interesting Moses response is well I'd better take my shoes off. I'm on holy ground here. Life itself is grace. All things are a manifestation of the living God who is breathing us into existence, and if that's true everything becomes spiritual. That's what I've started to love about the book of Leviticus.

True confession with Pastor Andy. There's some things in Leviticus I struggle with. There are some passages in there I struggle with. There's some there's some things that it says to do that I wrestle with. As I've read Leviticus these last few weeks, the thing that I've begun to appreciate about the ancients that wrote this particular document is that underlying the things that it says to do and don't do is this notion that all of life is holy and should be received and responded to accordingly. Take for example Leviticus 17. Not that you stop and read that on a Saturday afternoon. I bet you don't think oh I'm just going to read Leviticus 17 today, but if you do, in chapter 17 it talks about how we're supposed to respond to food. Food becomes spiritual when life itself is grace. There's a commandment in Leviticus 17 that says when you sacrifice an ox or a goat, you're supposed to take it to the altar of the Lord and then kill it. You cannot sacrifice it outside the city gates, it says. So when you take an ox or goat, you kill it, you're going to eat meat. You have to take it and kill it at the altar of the Lord. Now that did a couple of different things. First, it protected the community from falling into idolatry because people would go and make sacrifices unto other gods outside the community, and so if you can't do it outside the community. If they do inside the community, you won't fall in the idolatry. That's part of the motivation of that that command, but the other part of the motivation is this: when you're going to eat meat, you take that food and you put it on the altar of the Lord and you sacrifice it onto the Lord. All of a sudden eating meat or eating in general becomes a sacred experience. And that's so much different than the way we respond to food today. Today in our society, today we just consume it like it's ours and we don't even take a second thought about it. To the ancients, the simple act of celebrating a meal was a sacred experience because they saw that animal gave its life that they might have life. In some ways, I think people from Leviticus are smarter than we are today. This consumerism, this idea that it just belongs to us to consume and to do whatever we want to with it- I mean it being food the world the environment all this- it infects so much of our consumeristic society today. It's a reflection of our spiritual state today in my opinion, if everything is spiritual.

Leviticus 17 is about food and Leviticus 18 talks a lot about sex. I'm not going gonna go through that whole chapter. I think I've talked enough about sex in the last couple of weeks. We're going to move on through that chapter, but Leviticus 18 does talk about sex and all of a sudden if everything spiritual, sex is a sacred thing right. Sex is a sacred thing and Leviticus 18 is where we get one of the passages that deal with same-sex relationships. And I'm like I'm not going into all that but if you're interested in learning more about the historical context of same sex relationships and that kind of thing, I'd like to recommend you our book study Unclobber. He does a marvelous job talking about the Hebrew and historical context of Leviticus 18 and basically same sex relationships, that kind of thing. But just broadly speaking for this morning, understand this that if everything is spiritual, then sex should be honored and respected. OK. Leviticus 19, that's where our text comes from today. In Leviticus 19, if everything spiritual, then how we treat other people is a spiritual issue. In Leviticus 19 you find all these different commands and instructions about how people should be treated. It talks about how to treat parents; it talks about how to treat the elderly. It talks about how to treat handicapped folk.

Finally in Leviticus 19:33-34, it talks about how we treat immigrants and foreigners and aliens. Now I know that immigration is kind of like a hot button issue nowadays. I get it. And when I looked at the text this past week I'm like oh that's great. We're going to talk about immigration. I need another controversial subject to talk about. But it's a spiritual issue. According to Leviticus, how we treat foreigners and aliens and the outsider is a spiritual issue. And in that passage there's like three big things that it says. First it says you treat them like a citizen. You treat them like a citizen. If you have a foreigner in your midst, you treat them like a citizen. Second it says don't oppress them. Remember when you were in Egypt, don't do that. Don't oppress them. Literally, the Hebrew for the word oppressed in our verse today is don't cheat them. Don't cheat them out of what belongs to them. And then the passage ends 'for it says I am the Lord your God.' And the reason why we treat the foreigner, the alien, as a citizen, the reason why we don't oppress them is not in spite of faith. It's because of our faith that we do this. We believe that the treatment of other people is a spiritual issue. So here's some statistics I learned about immigration. I'm not an immigration expert, but a couple months ago we did a book study on immigration called 'Welcoming the Stranger.' And in this book, this is a great book if you're interested in immigration, but here's some statistics and things I didn't know about immigration. First, many of our ancestors came to this country before 1920 right. I mean many of our ancestors came here before 1920. If you have ancestors that came here but before 1920, that was before the current like visa system that we have today. And so our ancestors had a more streamlined ability to come and be a part of our country. It's just facts. Another interesting statistic I learned about immigration is that basically more than 50 percent of immigrants are not from Mexico. Not from Mexico. Learned that. One more statistic, I learned that that forty two percent of the estimated 11 million undocumented folks in our nation today are here because of an overstayed visa. This is a fascinating statistic to me because these are folks that said hey I'm going to go on vacation in the United States and so they're probably from like Ireland, Europe, these kinds of places. I'm going to vacation the United States and they get over here and they're like hey, I like it. I'll just stay. And the reason why we don't notice it we don't see it, it's because these folks with the overstayed visas quite frankly look like us. They look like us. For lack of a better term, they blend in. These are these are folks that live in New York City. They're living in Boston. They're living in the cities that you know we don't typically even think of when we think of immigration today. They just overstayed their visa.

So again I'm not an immigration expert so these are just things I've learned in the process of working on this sermon. But one of the things that I thought would be helpful for us is instead of just talking about statistics and ideas, I think for me when it comes to immigration or any big topic like this it's important to understand that it's more than an issue. These folks have names and they're human beings. And so I invited Tsubasa to come today- and Tsubasa is our guitar player this morning- and I'm just gonna invite him to share a little bit about what his experience has been like in terms of finding legal status in our country here in the United States. Tsubasa, just a few quick questions ok?

You've been a part of our congregation, you've been a member of our congregation for how long now? Since 2011.

Okay, so right. So. I mean think back in those days that would have been my Chris Neikirk era? Yes. And Kevin McKinney would have been pastor here, so yeah it's almost right about the same time when Pastor Steve was here. You're a PA. (Pre-Pastor Andy). Yes..

So tell me how long did it take for you to get your green card and another question: How long and how much money did you spend? It took eleven years in little short. Thirty six thousand dollars, that's combining the legal fees that I paid to lawyer and the filing fee that I pay for government. So eleven years and thirty six thousand dollars.

We've had this conversation earlier and our first there was. But since that service I'm going to kind of put you on the spot. Sure. As I thought about your story eleven years. Thirty six thousand dollars. The question that came to my mind Tsubasa is why were you so willing to struggle and to work so hard to be a part of this country? Well, with all the pain and agony and you know there are many times that I almost quit. You know I almost gave up but you know M.C. Hammer say too legit to qui. It's hammer time. Oh yeah. I'll never forget once he did a collaboration with Cy Gangnam Style. This was not the first service conversation. We've spent my late teens and early 20s in the States and that's when your identity as an adult is formed. So really my identity is an adult is formed in this country while my identity as a childhood is was formed in Japan. So by the age of you know early 20s or so mid 20s or so I just felt like this is where I belong. And by that time I've already spend a lot of time, money, and effort. You got a lot of help then and you name it. So I just felt like this will be let that go. I just wanted to see it to the end. And even if I fail you know I want it to fail. And that was my determination.

So this was like a as I'm listening to you as like this is this where you belong. This is where your identity was and you wanted to stay here and be a continue to be part of it. Right. Right. Right. How did the are our congregation help you in terms of your process of getting the green card and giving status in that way? How did our congregation help you? Well there are many people who helped me out and I want to say Jim pink helped me out tremendously. And obviously the Pastor Chris Nikirik and also to many many congregation members helped me out and in some kind of shape or form and just being able to be here you know just to be able to just stay at a piece.

I mean that that means a lot because with work visa you, have to renew the work visa every two to three years no matter what kind of visa your have; and approval for the extension process is not guaranteed. You could get denied which happened to me in 2012. So you always have this fear hanging over your shoulder. So my life back then was I always have that no matter how good of a things going on with my job personal life. I always have that in my head. So I was never really at ease. So it's been a difficult year. And with that and I'll say this the current immigration law assumes that all the applicants and not immigrants are guilty unless proven otherwise. That's the attitude in the immigration law which I think is a problem and making everything really tougher. So needless say it was tough.

Sure. Yeah. Well we celebrate your courage and we're glad you're with us man. I'm glad you can play the harmonica. Play the guitar, and I celebrate that this church was a body of Christ for you. Thanks for being able to share today. Thanks for coming up here.

I mean thank you. And before I forget to mention that what we all did, what the church helped me out is I was able together recommendation letters and letters that I submitted to Congressman Larry Buschan, and the church was very willing to help me out on that and that means a lot. And actually it was an pastor figure Rick Eades and others. It was his idea that, why don't I just bring this up to congress? And so I did and I'm very grateful that Pastor Chris Nikirik and Jim Coy and and others helped me out then and with all the massive difficulties. It was definitely a lesson. And also you know having to go through such a difficult flying it. I have more appreciation for what I have. And in 2012 when I was dead when my case was denied I had to go back to Japan. So I did. Well you know because my case was denied and I've got a letter saying that your case is an I for following reason and you are to leave the country immediately or file a motion in 30 days. So I left and and I and luckily I was able to get a visa and come back. A year later I got my green card. But when I went back to Japan you know my parents welcomed me with open arms even though I haven't seen them in a while. But from 2012 the last time I went to Japan was 2004. So I have not been to Japan for eight years so maybe thinking back that was a divine message that I had to go see them in Japan and maybe take a break a little bit and then to spend time with my mom and grandma and now I look at the whole thing. I'm glad that I went through. Now do I want to go through this thing again now but am I glad that I did. Yes because I have more appreciation for what I have. Thank you. Thank you. Yeah.

It's helpful for me to think in terms of more than an issue. They have names. And that's why I wanted to invite Tsubasa to come here today and to share his story because he's one of our members of our congregation. He's part of this body of Christ. If I was going to throw out a word to summarize today where I'm going with all of this it would be respect. Respect. If you think about the word respect, it's respect. Take a second look. That's what respect really is about. So people of the time we see folks through lenses that we've been we've been given, through our culture, through the news, through whatever we see through our lenses and we have thoughts and feelings about people and those thoughts and feelings really have us and we don't respect because of the lens that we've adopted and been given as a culture as a society. And so what respect really is about doing is like let's take a second look at a person not look at them through the lens of culture or politics or any of that stuff. But take a second lens and see folks through that what I would say is the lens of faith, Let's see folks through the lens of Christ. You see that's what we do here on Sunday morning when we say I see Christ in you. It's a practice in respect. We're respecting a person in the sense that we are remembering that that person is more than a lens more than an issue- that they are a child of the living God and how we treat one another is a spiritual. And so my challenge to us today and always is we have to remember to respect one another and if we're going to grow in our capacity to respect one another it means that we're willing to meet and reach out to the strangers in our lives you see because that's how we grow. That's how we grow up spiritually is we're able to to love to love to understand people who are different than us, look different than us, act different than us, and how we treat the strangers here. It is a spiritual issue.

I would invite the band to come in and play our closing song today and as they do I'm going to tell it just quick story about something that I did this past week. First time I've ever done this. This past Monday, I had a funeral and at that funeral they sang the doxology. I've done a bunch of funerals throughout my career and I've never had a funeral sing the doxology. I had to take a double take. I had to respect and take a double take and think how am I going to apply this. How am I going to play this? You know the doxology right? Praise God from whom all blessings flow... in the traditional worship service we sing it right after the offering. So we gather up the offering and then the organist begins to play the doxology and we offer the offering up to the altar. We bring it up the altar, put on the table, and so it came to the point of the service where we were gonna sing the doxology. The organist was gonna play it through twice. I'm like How am I gonna apply this? And I looked up the word doxology and I learned that the word doxology comes from the Greek word glory and praise. And so before we sang the doxology at this funeral, I told them about how we we sing it before we offer up our offering on Sunday morning. Then I explained to the group of people is like today we're gonna sing the doxology because her name is Nancy and Nancy offered her life up for the glory of God in the way that she lived her life. And we're here to celebrate remember and to give praise and thanks for the offering of Nancy's life. And so my challenge to each of you today is to remember to be a doxology to people. Remember to live your life in such a way that it reflects the glory of God but also remember to see the glory of God in the stranger. That's what it means to be a doxological person. Let's stand and let us sing our closing song. Amen.

*LAST HYMN UMH #121 ""There's a Wideness in God's Mercy"

*CHIMES & SERVICE OF LIGHT

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE "Fugue in E Minor" by T. S. Dupuis