



LEVITICUS

Living with

March 31 • Traditional Worship

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

Sunday Morning Volunteers:
•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 Marjory Bogan in her passing; the family of Ben Delgado in the passing of his mother; Rick Durgy; Becky Atkinson; Thornton Patberg; Sandy Brenneman
•Today's Sanctuary flowers given by Wanda Erwin to the glory of God in memory of Gene Erwin.
•Today's choral selections are provided by the Temple Choir under the direction of Don Travis. Organist: Barbara Waite.

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	
PRELUDE	"My Lord Is Near Me All The Time" by A. L. Page
CALL TO WORSHIP	
Leader: In ancient times, God gave us the Law. People: It was the gift of community and righteousness. Leader: There is wisdom in the teachings of our fathers and mothers. People: Praise God for the Law of Love!	
*CHORAL INTROIT	"Majesty, Worship His Majesty" by Hayford/Thomas
*CHIMES & SERVICES OF LIGHT	
*FIRST HYMN UMH #363	"And Can It Be that I Should Gain"
*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: Creator God, where we are worn and tired, bring new life. Where we have turned hard-hearted, bring new love. Where we feel hurt, bring forgiveness. Where we are prisoners, bring Your freedom. And now, O God, hear us as we pray in our own hearts and our own ways...	
GIVING OFFERING	"Rathbun" by R. Powell
*DOXOLOGY <i>the congregation stands as the Ushers return the offering to the Altar.</i>	#94 in Hymnal
ANTHEM	"Calvary Invitation" by Craig Courtney
KIDZ MOMENT	Noisy Offering
*SCRIPTURE READING	Leviticus 1:3-17
Leader: Praise God for the hearing of these sacred words. All: Thanks be to God.	
SCRIPTURE RESPONSE	"The Family Prayer Song" by Morris Chapman
MESSAGE by Pastor JillAnn Knonenborg	Sacrifices
<p>So I have to say the highlight of my morning so far has been watching y'all's reaction to Tessa reading that scripture. I'm realizing there probably should have been a trigger warning for the vegetarians in the congregation. During our Living with Leviticus series, I hope you've noticed two themes that make the Jewish law so relevant for us today. First Leviticus and the law books consider everything in human life to be a spiritual issue. What and how we eat. Who we welcome. How we work. So on and so forth. There is nothing in this life or on this earth that we should consider apart from our faith. Second in the past two centuries the Bible has often been treated like an answer book when in fact most of it is a question book. According to our Jewish brothers and sisters and the earliest Christian scholars, the Bible is not where our conversations about God and life end, but where they begin. The Bible is a lively debate within itself about what questions are important to God and thus what questions we should center our lives around. Not, for example, what do other people think of me? Or how can I make as much money as possible? But questions like Who is my neighbor? and where can I go to be with God? and what are we created for? I remember as a kid that whenever we would play a game outside the first thing we would have to do was establish the boundaries. There was the goal. There was the finish line. Overpassed those trees was out of bounds. For Christians the Bible should dictate our ideological boundary lines as we try to learn to be human in God's world. Within these boundaries, within that frame, there's plenty of room to move which brings us to graphically detailed instructions for sacrificing animals on the altar of the Tabernacle. But before we get into all that and what it might mean for us, will you pray with me?</p> <p>Gracious God as I strive to deliver your message this morning, may you increase and we decrease. For it is written that only in losing our lives will we find them. Amen.</p> <p>So let me set the scene. The Israelites have been freed from slavery in Egypt and they're beginning to create a nomadic community in the wilderness. What binds this community together is their shared belief that it was the Lord God who delivered them from slavery, but they have a problem which leads to a question. The writer Francis B. calls this problem, and I'm going to censor this a little bit, the human propensity to mess things up. I'll let you figure out where I censored it. You've heard it called Sin. Human beings hurt one another and disrespect God which makes God understandably angry. Now God being angry with us does not mean God does not love us anymore. If you have a really close friend, a spouse, a child you know that anger and love can exist simultaneously; but the Israelites still need to address the question: how can we live as a community if humans have this propensity to mess things up? Well the Israelites understood that reconciliation can only begin when a person acknowledges that he has hurt the community and God through his actions. An apology is needed and a commitment to do better in the future. The answer they came up with to their question was ritual sacrifice. Animal and grain sacrifices show up in the Bible many times prior to Leviticus. For instance you might recall that Cain killed his brother Abel because God preferred Abel's sacrifice. Noah sacrificed a bunch of his animals after they got off the ark which when you think about it seems kind of counterproductive to the whole Ark Project in first place. And they perform those sacrifices because three thousand years ago sacrifices were a central part of nearly every Near Eastern religion. So the issue was not whether Israelites would perform sacrifices, but how they would perform them and why. Most near eastern religions sacrificed their gods because they believed the gods needed to eat like humans. It was a you scratch my back I'll scratch yours kind of deal. Humans feed the gods, the gods don't kill all humankind for fun. Also the humans needed to thin the male animals out of their herd so why not satisfy the gods while you do it? But today's Leviticus passage tells us that the Israelites' sacrifices served a different purpose. Israel's God didn't accept sacrifices because he was hungry. God accepted sacrifices because God wanted the Israelites to know and to trust that they are in good standing with God. God didn't want the Israelites to worry that he was going to destroy them at any second just because they have a propensity to mess things up. These sacrifices offered a concrete, tangible assurance that God had forgiven them because God loved them which is great.</p> <p>But now another question arises: are big sacrifices better than small ones even if a small one is all you can afford? Does God love you extra if you are rich enough to give God a more expensive sacrifice? You may have noticed three kinds of animal sacrifices mentioned in today's passage. First comes cattle. Then comes sheep and goats and then birds. Only the wealthiest of the Israelites would have owned cows. The poorest owned no livestock of their own but could hunt for birds. Those poor folks wondered if God, and by extension their community, would be unimpressed with their sacrifices. I mean imagine being a stinky sweaty Israelite peasant camped in the mountains. It's sunrise on a high holy day when all the people bring their sacrifices to the altar. You are holding two scrawny pigeons in a makeshift cage as you wait to be called in by a priest to the Tent of Meeting. Next to you is your rich neighbor in his fancy Linen Clothes with perfume in his hair. He is holding the reins of a huge bull that has been bathed in oil. You look at your pigeons and then at the bull. Back at your pigeons and then the bull. Your heart sinks. Surely the Lord will favor your neighbor for this amazing gift. After all it's the gift you would prefer to receive. A priest in a pristine white robe steps out of the tent and calls for several people to enter including you and your neighbor. You follow him through the blue curtain and into a beautiful space full of bronze and gold. Everything smells of incense and firewood. At the opposite end of the tent priests covered in blood stand around a small wooden altar. They call your neighbor forward with his bull. Your neighbor and their priests lay hands on the bull as one priest, well you know what happens next. After the bull has been butchered, the priests arrange it on the fire and smoke fills the whole tent. The priest turns to your neighbor and assures him that his sacrifice is pleasing to the Lord. Now the priest calls you forward. You awkwardly open the top of the cage and pull out your pigeons. They feel even skinnier than you remembered. You hand them to one of the priests who quickly, again you know. Anyway once the birds have been prepared, the priest arranges them on the fire as well and once again smoke fills the tent. The priest turns to you with kind eyes and says your sacrifice is pleasing to the Lord.</p> <p>Centuries later the Jewish people, including Jesus, were still occasionally offering sacrifices but ever since the days of the prophet Micah they had been wondering whether they needed a new answer to their question. When their ancestors asked How do we live in community with one another and with God? maybe they misunderstood what made their God so different. And so Jesus gave a new answer. In Matthew 16, Jesus tells his disciples if you want to become my followers let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. In other words, to be a Christ follower is to offer yourself, your whole being, as a sacrifice to God. But we don't give our lives up because we have to in order to win God's favor. We give up our lives because as Jesus said, you want to be a follower to be a part of what Jesus is doing here and now because we long to be human in the way that God always intended us to be. Yet some questions remain the same through the ages. Even when it comes to offering our lives as sacrifices it's so easy to compare one to another and to see your sacrifice as better or worse than someone else's. But in Leviticus we see that God does not expect us to bring more than we have to give. God expects us to give our best but not more. We are to do what we can in the place where we are, our small bit of kingdom building.</p> <p>It is this principle of equity that makes the Leviticus all sacrificial system worth talking about in 2019. Even in those ancient times God's law recognized that serving God looks different for each of us. The objectives- reconciliation, love, forgiveness, community- are shared by all God's people but we contribute to them differently. Offering our lives as a sacrifice follows the same principle. A poor person is not necessarily called to serve God in the same way as a rich person, but both are pleasing to the Lord. A sick person may not be called to serve God in the same way as a healthy person, but both are pleasing to the Lord. A person in prison cannot serve God in the same way as a free person, but both are pleasing to the Lord. Regardless of one's advantages, no one is expected to do all the reconciling, all the loving, all the forgiving single handedly. We do it together in partnership with God as a community of faith. You know it's easy to judge others because the way they serve God doesn't look like the way I do. Those crazy Pentecostals with their speaking in tongues. Those Catholics with their praying through saints. Or those progressives with all their social justice talk. Or those traditionalists with their conversions and getting saved. Turns out though, it can all be pleasing to the Lord so long as it puts God and our neighbor before our own egos and as long as it heals what was hurting. Sacrifice is the beginning but within it there is plenty of room to move. Leviticus calls us, even now, to ask what will I sacrifice? What is it that I can do with my time, my energy, my money, my words to help heal the world? What do I already have that is more than sufficient to the task if I offer it to God's work? We know now what was always true. We don't have to offer sacrifices to love. We are given the opportunity and the privilege to let go of our own grip on our lives so that others may fully live. We can rest assured that whatever gift we bring with our whole hearts, it is pleasing to the Lord in. Amen.</p>	
*LAST HYMN UMH #294	"Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed"
*CHIMES & SERVICE OF LIGHT	
BENEDICTION	
POSTLUDE	"The King's Majesty" by M. Cor