

Sermon – Totteridge Road Mosque & All Saints 20th & 22nd December 2013

'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.' (Leviticus 19:2)

Illustration

At our recent Abrahamic Faiths gathering, Rachel, the Rabbi of the South Bucks Jewish Community spoke of the last Family Service she had led. It happened to be the day after Nelson Mandela had died. He had said *'I am not a saint unless you think of a saint as a sinner who keeps on trying'*. With his definition all of us here could be saints which is another word for 'holy ones'.

Rachel shared with us some thoughts on the portion of the Torah set for that day. And, as she did so, Imam Sultan and I smiled at one another because that text from Torah (the books of Moses - 1st five books of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures) was the equivalent of the one which he had chosen from the Holy Qur'an and which I had chosen from the Old Testament for our joint sermons in the Mosque and All Saints. You might like to have the texts in front of you as we speak. Today we stand together as leaders of our particular Faith communities and preach from our respective scriptures as they have been passed down to us. In this instance we speak a common word from God via his prophet Moses.

The particular focus I wish to begin with is the one Rabbi Rachel used: i.e. *'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'* (Leviticus 19:2)

Teaching

She asked the question, 'What does this scripture teach about what it is to be holy?' God has called His people to be holy – but what does that mean? What do you think?

Well, our readings speak of holiness as such things like, revering your parents, being kind to them and all your kin and loving your neighbour as your self.

The Torah continues in Leviticus 19 to speak of holiness as, in addition, providing for the poor, not stealing or acting falsely, rather, acting justly, compassionately and treating strangers as of your own community. It includes showing no partiality and not gossiping.

So the Divine command to be holy is not so much about being religious in the sense of going to church or mosque, although that should help and inspire us to be holy, but it is primarily about how we live our everyday life in relation to others. As the prophet Micah put it, 'What does the Lord require of you but to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God'. This is true religion – and it blesses God and the world in which we live. It promotes peace and harmony.

As Jesus, put it, *'The whole of the Law (the Torah) and the Prophets can be summarized in this, 'Love God with all your heart, soul mind and strength and Love your neighbour as yourself.'* And, as Jesus' beloved disciple John put it, *'God is love and those who live in love live in God and God lives in them.'* And, *'Whoever says he loves God but hates his brother is a liar';* and, *'If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us.'*

Hence, we stand together today as an expression of love and respect for one another and, by extension, for one another's Faith community.

Application

So the Divine command to be holy is not beyond our reach. What's more it causes us to be happy.

Did you know that years of research done by three professors, one a psychiatrist, one a neurologist and one a sociologist, revealed that we experience joy and happiness when a chemical called dopamine is released into the brain? They proved that this happens when we do acts of kindness, compassion and service together of the wider community.

What a wonderful thing if people said about our Faith communities – 'What a happy bunch!'

Simply, being holy leads to an extraordinarily joyful and fulfilled life as well as helping to bring peace in the world.

Looking to Christmas

A few weeks ago, I was given a couple of Christmas cards created by Dr Mohammed Fahim – the Chairman and Head Imam of the South Woodford Muslim Community Centre. On them were various texts from the Holy Qur'an about Mary and Jesus. For instance, (3:46), 'Behold! The angels said, "O Mary! God gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and (the) Hereafter and of the company of those nearest to God.' So his name 'Christ Jesus' we can honour together today.

As we look ahead to Christmas, there is a hope that both our Faith communities share; each of us looks to God's rule of justice and peace on earth which, together, we believe will come through the return and earthly rule of Christ Jesus, of which both our Holy Scriptures speak. As the Name Christ is the Greek version of the Hebrew word Messiah. We together, with our Jewish brothers and sisters, pray for and work for peace on earth and good will to all. So we share our prayers and common word today as a sign of trying, at least, to be holy as God means it.

Let us then, like Mary, through our willingness to submit to God and, thereby, live out lives which are loving, kind, compassionate, merciful and just – embody the ways of peace as we await Christ's return. Let's keep trying at least and thereby be true saints – God's holy ones.

Amen.

(927 words – just under 6 mins)

The Reverend Hugh Ellis

Team Rector – High Wycombe Team Ministry

Vicar of All Saints, High Wycombe

Holy Qur'an (Chapter 4 verse 36)

"Worship God and do not associate anything with him and be Kind to the parents and to the relatives and the orphans and the needy and the neighbour who is your relative and the neighbour who is not your relative and the companion by your side and the traveller and those whom your right hand possess, Indeed God does not love one who is proud and boastful."

Prophet Muhammad PBUH said

"None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself."

(Hadith)

Deuteronomy (Chapter 6 verses 4-6)

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

Leviticus (Chapter 19 verses 1-4)

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. ³You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. ⁴Do not turn to idols or make cast images for yourselves: I am the LORD your God.

⁷You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.

