

Matthew 22:34-46

Preached for Stone Church of Willow Glen via Zoom by Rev. Samantha Evans

October 25, 2020

Consecration

Well hello my dear friends, and welcome to this service of worship on this Consecration Sunday. First and foremost, I have to give a huge shout out to Ms. Pamela Hood for your work on the All God's Creatures video. I am in awe of your gifts and skills.

A shout-out to Peggy Spool for your direction and creativity and vision for the children's choir.

And of course, to the kiddos. Your joy and your offering of music is just lifting my soul this week! I just cannot tell you how much I appreciate you.

These are the joys of living in community. We get to come together and offer our gifts, our skills, our talents, and mix it all together to create something beautiful, something that inspires us, lifts us up, and shows us how to live into the truest and godliest versions of ourselves.

All God's Creatures have a place in the choir. Halleluiah! Amen.

On this Consecration Sunday, which is well-known in the church as the day that we make our pledges for the coming year, I just want to begin with a word about "consecration," what it means and why we use it to describe what we do on this day.

To consecrate something is to make it holy or sacred. Catholic Priests consecrate water to make it holy water. In the Jewish tradition, synagogues are consecrated spaces. Same thing in the Mormon tradition, after the completion of the building, their temples are officially consecrated. In many indigenous cultures, there are specific rituals around consecrating certain holy spaces. In Buddhism, there are rituals for consecrating images of the Buddha.

And on and on, throughout history and throughout the world, there exists this idea of consecration. Making something or someone or someone holy.

In the Hebrew tradition, from which we inherit our understanding of consecration, the root word here is *qadosh*, which is a Hebrew word that means holy or sacred or pure. And in the Hebrew Scriptures, there is a lot of discourse about how to make

oneself or holy or pure, as well as how to make spaces holy and befitting of the presence of the divine.

And to our modern, Reformed mind, this might feel a bit cringe-worthy. Holiness or purity culture has done a lot of damage in our society and in many of our lives, so it's especially important to me and I'm sure to many of you that we be explicit about what we mean.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, there contains the Law. This includes the 10 Commandments, and also a bunch of other laws, ordinances, practices, which are offered to the people of God in order to make them, their spaces, their families, their nations holy.

And there is certainly a lot of Scriptural evidence which might draw one to conclude that personal piety or purity is our most important practice of consecration. Washing our hands before eating, for instance, is contained in this law as a practice of becoming holy. Preparing yourself to keep the Sabbath by buying what you'll need for day or precooking your meals, so that you can simply dwell with God, an act of living into the holy.

These laws are listed in the Hebrew Scriptures, but what's important for us to note is that from our very US-American, individualistic point of view, we have come to interpret these laws and laws like them to serve our own interests. We are led to believe that our personal purity or holiness will benefit us in earthly and/or heavenly blessings. It's such a transactional way of understanding holiness and blessing, and it is not at all how it works.

If this is your first time hearing this, I am sorry. I know that sometimes when y'all do something really exceptional, I joke that you've earned yourself gem for your crown in heaven...but unfortunately, this just isn't how it works. In heaven or on earth. This lawyer asks Jesus:

Which commandment in the law is the greatest?" And [Jesus] said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment..."

And second is like it, he says: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

God has given us the law and through it invites us to be holy like God is holy, not so that we may be rewarded, but rather so that we can be who we truly are.

Personal purity or holiness shall always be understood within the context of community. Which is to say that anything we do to consecrate ourselves, to make ourselves holy or pure or good or what have you, must be done not in service to our own, individual selves but rather in service to being who God created us as a community to be.

Washing our hands for instance, keeps us clean, yes, and it also keeps us from sharing potentially deadly germs from folx in our community.

Keeping the Sabbath allows us to rest, yes, as we all rest together, we are given a glimpse of the beloved community, where we all dwell and live in justice and peace.

Loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind leads us to love how God loves. We are shown how to love ourselves, through the eyes of God, and we are invited to love our neighbors, through the love of God.

Becoming holy, or consecrated, thus is about living in right relationship with God and Creation. These laws are given to help us structure our communities and our societies in a way that keeps all people and all living things safe and healthy and whole, so that all of Creation can dwell in love and justice and joy.

This vision could not be further from our reality. In the modern world, so much of our lives and our culture stands in stark contrast to who God created us to be, and it is difficult and sometimes even impossible to be or live how God desires.

But I am sick and tired of living in this unholy world. I am sick and tired of greed and violence defining what it means to be powerful and who gets to wield power. I am sick and tired of those in power abusing their positions and the authority by perpetuating gross injustice against those in our society who are already marginalized.

I am sick and tired of American Exceptionalism, White Supremacy, the “live and let live” mentality, or the pick yourself up by your bootstraps ideology.

I am sick and tired of all of it, and I am sure, I know y’all are too. And that is because it is exhausting being someone you are not. It is exhausting living in a way that is not conducive to who you are.

And friends, the ways of greed and violence, the ways of White Supremacy, the ways of exclusion and terrorism against marginalized people...this is not who we were created to be and this is not the vision of the world that God has cast for us.

Though we are living in a disordered and unholy world, we shall not be deterred because we know who and whose we are. We know what is good and right and just, and we know that our holiness is communal.

In our life together and with God, we are invited to consecrate ourselves, our church, our city...to make holy this entire world.

We are invited to offer our hearts, souls, and minds to God...to offer of our time, talents, and treasures to building God's kin-dom.

We are invited to become holy like our God is holy, to love God, to love what God loves¹, and to build the beloved community, the kin-dom of God, where all living things may thrive, where justice is done, peace is lived, and life and love and joy are made abundant.

On this Consecration Sunday, with hope and with joy for the world that is to come, I make my pledge to Stone Church. And I pray y'all will, too.

In the name of the Triune God, who creates, sustains, and redeems us all. Amen.

¹ Tim Beach-Verhey, "Theological Interpretation," *Feasting on the Word: Year A*.