As we just read, in a continuation of his letter written to the early church in Corinth, Paul reminded us that **despite our human wisdom and knowledge of this world, we are still fools in God’s sight.** How often do we think egotistically that we know the solutions to every problem or every question there is, based on our human knowledge and intelligence? Our modern technology makes it even easier with just a few simple stroke on the keyboards or even ask the question with our own voices, and hundreds (if not thousands) of results will flash across our faces. But does that really make us a smarter person or someone who can make a wiser decision and a sounder judgement? Maybe maybe not? ….yet often time we only find ourselves failing so miserably and disappointing God’s expectation and others.

The key to all of this I believe, as we discussed last week, is that the source of our human wisdom is God and that we acknowledge our fundamental relationship with God is found upon God’s covenant that was established for generations. And that is not going to change!

As part of that covenant, God has called us to be His “holy” people just as the LORD our God is holy. But what does God mean by being “holy”? Based on whose definition? Or is that too idealistic or wishful thinking for someone who may be considered unworthy in character and behaviors?

First of all, **to be “holy” doesn’t mean we are more special, more perfect or righteous than the others**. Being “Holy” literally means that we are called to be **“set-apart”** and **“dedicated”** to do God’s work. That means at times we may be called upon to take a stand against conformity and to swim against the prevailing tide. And that’s OK, because each of us are uniquely created and called by God in order to fulfill God’s purpose here on earth.

Over the last couple of weeks, we’ve read a number of passages from the Old Testament, namely from the prophet Micah, the book of Deuteronomy, and Leviticus today, concerning the various laws and requirements that the LORD expected the people to abide to. These laws and requirements were not abolished or abandoned when Jesus arrived. The old laws are still the only rabbinical laws that were in place, they’re simply being supplemented by some of the new laws and new interpretations and understandings of those laws.

There was another purpose for these Old Testament laws as they were handed down to the people as a **“measuring stick”** or a **benchmark** of how we should live our lives. These laws were set in place, not to restrict us but to liberate us and grant us freedom from our sins. God was more concerned about our **obedience** and **allegiance** rather than the **rituals** and **practices of the law** itself as required. There is a difference there.

In the passage that we read earlier from the book of Leviticus, there were series of “**You Shall Not**”s in this brief passage - You shall not do this; you shall not do that! This was just one of several references of the Ten Commandments through the Torah – the first 5 books in the Hebrew Testament. All of these “You Shall Not”s were complimented by a few “**You Shall**”s - *“****You shall be holy”, “You shall fear your God”, “with justice you shall judge your neighbor”,*** and ***“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*** One other thing we also notice is that, in each of these statement, God followed by repeatedly reminded the people “**I am the LORD**” or “**I am the LORD your God**”.

Obviously, the LORD wanted the people to remember who is still in charge here? Who is still in control? Don’t you ever forget who I am and what I have done for you?

How often do we hear from our parents “Don’t do this!” or “Don’t do that!”? I know I get that from my mom from time to time still. But often times parents do this not because they want to restrict our freedoms, but they did it out of their love and concern. They want to make sure that we don’t make the same mistakes, perhaps they’ve learned from their own experience of the past.

In the same way, when God our heavenly parent handed down those laws to the people, expecting us to listen and oblige, but yet the people still didn’t get it. We didn’t get it and we don’t want to hear it. Each day we still violate those commands in various forms and natures. We’ve disappointed God and disgraced God’s image and mission as intended.

These were ethical and moral laws that shaped the bases of teachings. They defined our “holiness” as the LORD declared, “*You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”[[1]](#footnote-1)* These principles shall guide our everyday actions, our words, and our thoughts, as Jesus taught his disciples to “*be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”[[2]](#footnote-2)*

However, to be “perfect” does not mean that we are to be without sins. Scripture tells us that *“For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.”[[3]](#footnote-3)* **God does not expect us to be perfect (and God knows that we’re not), but that should not prevent us from striving for the wholeness, holiness, and the perfection in Christ.**

When we realize how much we, as a human race, have fallen short of God’s standard of perfection, it keeps us humble and motivates us not to make the same mistakes again. God grieves every time when human beings sin against each other and against God. How often have we spoken words that we may regret later on, or have acted in any selfish and irrational way that others’ feelings are hurt? Or if we see acts of injustice happening around us, we pretend that it’s not our problem by remaining silent and let our complacency sink in? Is that ethical and morally responsible of us as God’s witnesses of love and compassion in this world? Certainly not!

A couple of weeks ago, you might have heard it on the news, a young man named Jared Nied was taking his usual Downtown #1 train ride in the Upper West Side. The moment he got in to the subway car, he noticed there was something different. Blatantly he noticed that there were graffiti written all over the cabin of the subway car. Now, you may say, “what’s the big deal, right?” We’ve seen graffiti on the subway all the time, just like back in the later 70’s and early 80’s. But upon closer looks, these were not just graffiti, these were symbols and messages of hate against particular ethnic group of people, and in this case against the Jewish people. Jared felt that something needs to be done about this. He couldn’t stand his personal conscience to tolerate these messages of hate that are blatantly staring before his eyes. He reached for his tissue, napkins, and hand sanitizers (or whatever he could find) and started scrubbing down those anti-sematic and hateful remarks. Other fellow passengers saw what he was doing and they too joined in the action as well.

Jared took the MTA slogan of *“if you see something, say something”* to another level quite literally. **“*If you see something, do something!”*** Jared felt that if we don’t do anything, we would take a stand in complacency and conform to the systemic hate and intolerance. He felt that this was the least that he could do in order to take back control of the city that he loves. Who was he, just an average subway rider? Jared’s courage and action sent a message of hope that ultimately love triumphs and prevails over human hatred...against anybody.

**To be holy** does **not** mean that we need to make grand sacrifices to God, donate a large sum of money to charity, to see who can recite the longest prayers or who can name all the books in the Bible. No! **To be holy means standing up for what is right and honorable against systems of injustice and hate in our society.** It’s about protecting the rights of those who are innocent and vulnerable, or those who have been victims of bullying and abuses of those who are with power. **To be holy** means taking initiatives in looking out for the needs of others, beginning with ourselves, by treating the workers fairly and paying them the wages that they deserve. **To be holy** means not only are we being “set apart” but to build relationship and build bridges with others, among God’s people.

**Furthermore, it would be scandalous to our faith in proclaiming God’s “holiness” in our lives, if we fail to seek the “wholeness” of unity in the Body of Christ**. It is not enough to claim that we are “IN” the body and that we’re saved, while there are others who are struggling to make-ends-meet and are being marginalized and shunned by the rest of the society. Throughout his teachings, Jesus reminded us that God’s Kingdom and God’s vision will not be fully realized until the day when whole body becomes holy once again.

As one theologian pointed out that **God dwells in the temple, but the temple is not just a building, it is a community.** **Community is what we are called to build, knowing that the Holy Spirit dwells in the people of God**.[[4]](#footnote-4) God is still in charge and reign supreme over us, no matter what life circumstances may bring.

In a couple of weeks, the season of Lent will soon be upon us. Lent is a season of self-reflection and meditation, we are awakened and challenged to look into our lives and examine our own journey of faith. How’s it going? Who is still running the course? Have we found ourselves being compromised by the whirlwinds, chaos and confusions all around us? Have we found ourselves being lost out at the sea or derailed wandering out in the wilderness? Do we still have our eyes fixed on Jesus and nothing and no one else? These are all valid questions that we must ask ourselves, especially throughout this season of Lent.

As we gaze upon the powerful symbol of our faith – the cross, it reminds us of not only who Christ is and what he has done leading up to the cross, but more importantly whose we are as vulnerable dependents of Christ. **The empty cross fills our spiritual void, so that we may be made whole once again, especially in such broken and fractured society that we live in today.**

Through our text this morning, God reassured us once again that

***“I am the Lord Your God. I am still in charge!”***even when things may seem to be out of our hands and spiraling out of control. No individual, groups of individuals, or the powers of the world shall reign supreme over our Lordship of Christ. *The wisdom of this world is [still] foolishness with God.”[[5]](#footnote-5)*

So, therefore, let us stand firm in doing what the LORD requires of us, that is –  ***to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God****.[[6]](#footnote-6)* Let us be Holy as the LORD our God is Holy.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Leviticus 19:2* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Matthew 5:48* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Romans 3:23* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Foster Connors, Kate *Feasting on the Word Year A, Volume 1 p.378* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *I Corinthians 3:19* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Micah 6:8* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)