

SLOW READING: NEIGHBOUR-LOVE

We all know that Jesus says to love our neighbour, but perhaps you're not aware that he is quoting a much-maligned book of the Bible, Leviticus. Leviticus sets out how to live as God's distinctively holy people. As such, it touches on every area of life. We live in a very different place, time and culture, and many of Leviticus's provisions now seem harsh, weird or unnecessary to us. But the instructions concerning neighbour-love continue to speak with great clarity and moral force. Given this is the only time Jesus quotes Leviticus, it is well for us to pay attention. Therefore, you are invited to read the passages below slowly and prayerfully, and meditate on what neighbour-love looks like today.

READ

Read the texts aloud, twice. Listen carefully, and notice what emerges for you (words, feelings, thoughts, images, associations ...).

The greatest commandments:

A lawyer asked Jesus a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' 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 a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.' (Matthew 22:34b-40)

What does neighbour-love look like?

You shall not defraud your neighbour; you shall not steal; you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a labourer until morning. You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling-block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. Be fair, no matter who is on trial – you shall not favour either the poor or the rich: with justice you shall judge your neighbour. You shall not lie about people, or profit from your neighbour's suffering: I am the Lord. You shall not hate. You shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord ... When the foreigner comes to live with you in your land, you shall not oppress them. The foreigner who lives with you shall be like the citizen among you; you shall love the foreigner as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God (Lev. 19:13-18, 33-34)

REFLECT

Speak aloud any word or phrase which stood out or surprised you. Don't comment or explain, just say the word or phrase aloud so you can hear it again.

RELATE

What do these texts reveal about God, world, church, family or yourself? What might the authors have to say about employment practices, accessibility, billionaires, people seeking asylum, or the culture of social media? As we head towards an election, how might these words challenge or inform us?

RESPOND

Is God calling you to anything in response? Perhaps a prayer, perhaps an action.

REST

Take a minute or so of silence to rest in God's presence and absorb whatever has arisen in this time.