

Wednesday, February 21, 2018 – Lent Midweek II
“Holy, Wholly, Holy”

1 Peter 1: 15-17

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Calling Us Home – CSL Series
Frame and Refrain Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

God is calling, God calling you and God calling me, calling us home. But what does that mean as we journey toward Jesus' return? This being Lent, the obvious answer might be that God is calling us to repentance. That's the obvious answer and it is true, but repentance can be done too easily, too superficially. In fact, we can actually repent in a way deceives us. I know the sermon has just begun but I need your full attention right now. Lent is a penitential season and repentance is what we do, I stress *do*, in penitential seasons. Doing repentance is not enough.

1 Peter 1:15-17 says, “As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.” As wonderful as life in this world can sometimes be, we’re still in exile from our true home. There are dangers and deceptions all around, and one temptation is simply going through the motions of doing outward repentance without a real change of heart. Jesus complains about people who just go through religious motions. “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:8; Isaiah 29:13). So let’s listen up, listen up with care and even with some anxiety, lest we forget that we’re headed to the holy God who expects us to come to him in true holiness – holy, **wholly** holy.

“You shall be holy, for I am holy.” Holiness describes the inmost nature of God, His transcendent perfection. “Holy, holy, holy,” the seraphim sang in Isaiah’s vision of the heavenly throne room and we sing “Holy, holy, holy” in the popular hymn, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty.” But do we sometimes sing that with too much familiarity? I confess that I do. After all, God’s being is beyond anything creaturely. Who can understand the being of the transcendent God? God thundered at Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (Job 38:4). God’s holiness, His transcendent being,

He's so high above us is not simply an intellectual concept to be grasped. God's holiness, God's being is so great that it produces an emotional reaction that should seize our total being. I'll say it again, God's holiness, His transcendent being is so great that it produces an emotional reaction that should seize our whole being. That reaction to God's incomprehensible being, our fundamental feeling in Lent is...

Please get this because this is so essential to Lent. Our fundamental feeling in Lent is fear, fear caused by the holiness of God.

But not just fear; "We should fear and love God." So let's understand what this fear of God is that makes us love God. The fear of God is not slavish fear. This is not cowering fear. Nor should we be deceived into the opposite extreme, flip familiarity before God. This fear of God is an awe, a reverence, a shut-me-up stillness not just at the holiness of God but especially... This is so important!... especially that the Holy One comes to us and teaches us to call Him "Father." Our text says, "If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile." This fear is not just that we will come before God at our last heartbeat. Oh, that's scary enough. Have you ever had medical tests where they hook you up to monitors? You see what's really going on in your body, things you had no idea about. Think about what God sees in you! "Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults." (Psalm 19:12)

Oh, God has every right to punish us for our sins! True as that is, it's not the fear of punishment that wows us this Lent. No, it's our amazement that God is for us, not against us. God is calling us home. We are journeying to Him but He is already coming to greet us, coming to greet us like the father greeted the prodigal son, coming to us while we are still on the way, coming to us in his Son Jesus Christ to lead us home. "Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Psalm 34:11). The fear of God that looks to Jesus leads us to be holy, not just do holy things.

What does being holy mean in a place like this? We are surrounded by holy things, church architecture and church furnishings, special clothes, special robes, classrooms and conversations, rituals and liturgies... all seemingly holy things that make us look holy to others and deceitfully tempt us to superficiality. Remember Jesus' complaint? "This people honors me

with their lips, but their heart is far from me.” I’ll say it again: We are surrounded by holy things that make us look holy to others and can tempt us to superficiality, to doing repentance instead of truly being repentant. Martin Luther talks about a pure heart. It’s a long quotation but it’s worth hearing.

“Then what is a pure heart? In what does it consist? The answer can be given quickly, and you do not have to climb up to heaven or run to a monastery for it and establish it with your own ideas. You should be on your guard against any ideas that you call your own, as if they were just so much mud and filth. And you should realize that when a monk in the monastery is sitting in deepest contemplation, excluding the world from his heart altogether, and thinking about the Lord God the way he himself paints and imagines him, he is actually sitting—if you will pardon the expression—in the dung, not up to his knees but up to his ears. For he is proceeding on his own ideas without the Word of God; and that is sheer deception and delusion, as Scripture testifies everywhere. What is meant by a “pure heart” is this: one that is watching and pondering what God says and replacing its own ideas with the Word of God. This alone is pure before God, yes, purity itself, which purifies everything that it includes and touches. Therefore, though a common laborer, a shoemaker, or a blacksmith may be dirty and sooty or may smell because he is covered with dirt and pitch, still he may sit at home and think: “My God has made me a man. He has given me my house, wife, and child and has commanded me to love them and to support them with my work.” Note that he is pondering the Word of God in his heart; and though he stinks outwardly, inwardly he is pure incense before God. But if he attains the highest purity so that he also takes hold of the Gospel and believes in Christ—without this, that purity is impossible—then he is pure completely, inwardly in his heart toward God and outwardly toward everything under him on earth.” (Luther’s Works, 21:33)

That makes me wonder about being a pastor, since we pastors do holy things. I need to be holy, **wholly** holy. Luther’s words should make us all concerned to be holy and not just do holy things, like go through the motions of repentance. A seminary professor wondered about it this way. Since our church claims to have the correct teaching of the Bible, and I believe we do, are we taking the Word for granted and looking to other things? If we believe we have decided

that our understanding of the Bible and Gospel is correct, are we moving on to something “more advanced?” Are we tempted to take holiness for granted? Have we forgotten the salutary fear of God? Do we see that our only holiness is in Jesus? Have we settled in too much in this world, become too comfortable and become too careless in our exile?

Oswald Chambers wrote, “The characteristic of a disciple is not that he does good things, but that he is good in motive because he has been made good by the supernatural grace of God. The only thing that exceeds right-doing is right-being.” If you look at today’s worship folder, you see that the sermon title is a play on the words of the hymn, “Holy, holy, holy.” God is holy. When God tells us to be holy, he means completely holy, **wholly** holy, completely holy, through-and-through holy. Conduct is doing; being holy precedes doing. “You also be holy in all your conduct.” God is calling us home, holy, **wholly** holy. Amen.