

Blog for Week 10, April 8

By Karen Hinz – Who Can Do All This?

Leviticus makes me want to throw my hands in the air. This is impossible! Who can do all this? (Honestly, who would want to?) Trying to follow these rules is like playing Whack-A-Mole, that Chuck E. Cheese game where the moles keep popping up and your job is to hit them with a cartoon mallet, but at each move you make toward a peeking mole, a mole on the other side of the board pops up. It's maddening!

Overwhelming rules lead to two possible outcomes: trying to do it everything right, or NOT trying. People who try to do something beyond their ability become perfectionists, judgmental of themselves and others. This leads to self-righteousness or anger, or both. On the other hand, people who don't try to do what is beyond their ability can check out. This can mean either defiance – boldly forging their own path – or despair – withdrawing in fear. Which of these most closely describes you, in relation to living out God's laws? None of these outcomes seem like what God hopes for his people!

Today's reading brings in some new things. Laws about Sabbaths and festivals, and when and how to celebrate. Again, some Whack-A-Mole detail about stacking bread just right... But then we get a terrifying and specific narrative about a man who blasphemed and was stoned to death on God's command. (To be honest, this story left the perfectionist in me both afraid and angry.)

But today's reading ends with a focus on the concept of Jubilee, a "reset" every 50 years. It's my understanding that Israel never really observed this – at least not very well. But it seems shockingly relevant to today. Jubilee is about two things: land and slavery. I have been spending considerable time this year learning about racism and history. At the center of the racism against Indigenous Americans is the taking of land. The line on p. 193 jumped off the page at me: "The land must never be sold on a permanent basis, for the land belongs to me. You are only foreigners and tenant farmers working for me." Wow. That flies in the face of an American understanding of "property rights." And the Jubilee was a time to return the land to its previous people. And then, the section on slavery, that people who are "fellow Israelites" can never be treated harshly, and never held as permanent slaves. Today, we very often swap the Church in for Israel in understanding who "our people" are meant to be. I recently learned that many Africans taken into slavery and transported to America were Christian before coming, since Christianity was historically established in many parts of Africa. God set the Jubilee as a way to limit the debt of slavery, and to promote freedom. How does this speak to our history and its lingering effects?

How might we hold more loosely to what we think we own? How might we seek the freedom of God's Jubilee in our lives?

Is it possible to seek holiness before God with more of a 50-year lens than a moment-by-moment Whack-A-Mole lens?

Or is Leviticus meant to make us ask: "Who can save us from this body of death?"