

I was in CVS
On December 27th
Last Sunday
And I couldn't believe it
But they were already
Putting their Valentine's Day stuff out

No rest,
We have to go right in to
The next money making holiday

But before we jump to Valentine's day
We need to remember that
as the church
Today we move into a new season
The season of Epiphany

*The word Epiphany means manifestation
Or appearance
Or revealing

And Epiphany is a time
When we see
And celebrate the manifestation
The revealing of Christ's divinity

We see it in the arrival of the Wise men
We see it in Jesus baptism
When the Spirit of God
Descended upon Jesus like a dove

And the voice said,
“This is my son”

And finally,
In the transfiguration
When Jesus turned dazzling white
And was joined on the mountain
By the great Prophet Elijah
And the great Redeemer Moses

Epiphany is about showing
The world
That Jesus was
Divine
And of the same being as the Father

**And maybe that is where the problem starts

See,
I often hear in our society
What I call the wicked step father theology

That God is this mean,
Angry God
That would just love to throw us
In hell

But Jesus won't let him,
And he dies for our sins
And now we have salvation

Only because of Jesus

First,

If God was that nasty,
Why would anybody want to live in heaven
With him?

That wicked stepfather
Angry God theology
Is terrible
And it is not scriptural

*We are told that
Jesus and the father are one
Jesus only does what the Father wants him to do

The scripture is clear
That Jesus didn't just wake up one morning
And decide he needed to go to earth

But the father
Sent the son
Christmas is the father sending Jesus
To our world
To redeem his people

We will say it in a few minutes
In the Nicene Creed
Jesus and the Father are one

God from God
Light from light
True God from true God
Begotten not made
Of one being with the Father

if our image
of the heavenly father
is an different than our image
of the loving son
who welcome
who forgave
who cared for all people

We have the wrong image of the Father

*However,
That is not what we often hear
in religion in our culture

Our country was founded by Puritans
Who heard the infamous sermon
From Jonathan Edwards
“Sinners in the hands of an angry God”

And that has shaped the religion
Of our country
More than we may realize

Think about something
What do we call hurricanes
And tornados
And natural disasters

Acts of God

We don't call any of the good stuff
Acts of God
But the bad events
Those are acts of God

And you wonder why
Our society has an image
Of an angry God

you wonder why
when bad things happen
to people
they ask why is God doing this to me

God's not doing that to you
God isn't angry

As first John tell us God is love

God doesn't manifest love
God doesn't act loving
God is love!

**So this morning
I am going to say something
That you may never have heard a pastor say before

My primary teaching text
Is going to be Leviticus
And I am going to show you the manifestation
Of a loving God
In the book of Leviticus

I googl-ed piced Leviticus
To get a picture for the power point
And this is the first picture
That came up

Man, that picture just screams love

**I know the book of Leviticus
Is not one we often look to
To see the love of God

In fact,
Usually it is not a book
We look to at all

We think it is just a bunch
Of arbitrary laws
That really don't have much to do with us
Any more at all

And really that is often how we think of it,
That the Old Testament
Is just full of a bunch of rules
And laws
Of an angry God

And the New Testament
Is the story of love
And Jesus' grace
And it is all wonderful
So we will just read the New Testament

**I had a man come in to my office one time
And he was upset about something
In the church
And he was telling me how
He would like to handle it

And I told him,
Now that doesn't reflect God's grace
To the world
And it doesn't invite people to know Jesus better

And he told me
I am not into all the grace
I am an Old Testament Christian

I said,
Then you are a Jew
And you better stop eating barbeque

**There is a lot of law in the New Testament
Jesus talks about being thrown into the outer darkness
Where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth

And trust me
If we would take the time to understand
The origins
And the background
We would see that
There is a lot of grace
And love in the Old Testament

God hasn't changed
He is always been
And will always be
The same loving God.

**Think about something for a minute
The 10 Commandments
That we like to throw in people's faces
As the supreme law of God

Why was the Ten Commandments given?
Because the people of Israel
Had just been enslaved in Egypt
For over 400 years

They didn't have rights
They didn't have chooses

They did what they were told to do

And you take them out of that environment

And then all of the sudden

Give them complete freedom

They aren't going to know how to act

The Ten Commandments

Were God protecting his people

From themselves

Live this way

or you are not going to have peace and harmony

but turmoil and violence

and that isn't what God wants for his people

*Also, real quick

Look at the preamble to the 10 Commandments

Notice what word is missing?

Commandments

God said these are my ten words

Now I don't know about you

But words doesn't give me the same feeling

As commandments

If somebody said

Let me give you a word

A word of advice

A word of encouragement

Even a word of warning

It makes it seem like they care for me
More than if they just give me a commandment

**So, let's take a moment to look at the Levitical laws
And I will show you
Why Leviticus reveals God's love
And is one of the most radical books
In all the Bible

**But we have to go back to the time period for a moment
And realize that at this time
Everybody had a god
And every god had an altar

And what would happen
Is you would give a sacrifice to your god
And if everything was good
Then you assumed your god was pleased

However,
If things didn't go well
Drought
Bad crops
Pestilence
Whatever

Then you were forced to assume
Your god was not pleased

With your offering
So you would give more

And then if the rains don't come
You have to give more
And more and more

To the point
That if it was a drought
You would literally run out of things to give

*Just a side note real quick
The whole concept of giving offerings
To please our God
Actually comes from ancient traditions
Not our God

Our offerings
Aren't to please God
But to show God love and appreciation
For what our God has already done

Our God doesn't want us to fear him
But to know
And to love him

Interesting,
Talk about portraying an angry God
The word in Hebrew
Yirah

That we translate fear
In regards to fearing God

Is better translated
Respect
Or even awe
To be in awe of our God

Again,
Kind of a different meaning
If you think about it.

*So back to the other gods,
We have records
That the priest of Baal
A god we hear about in the Old Testament

But the priests of Baal,
We literally cut themselves
And bleed unto the altar
To try and make peace with God

Because if Baal won't take my sacrifice
Surely he has to be happy with my blood

*We've excavated Aztec temples
And found mass baby graves
Because in times of droughts
People would drown their own children

And offer them as a sacrifice to TLALOC
The God of Rain and agriculture
Hoping that would make him happy

**See,
In our 21st century mindset
We sometimes get confused
When reading that second lesson

We see it as the faith of Abraham
To sacrifice his son
For God
And that is important
And that is part of the text

But many ancient Palestinians
When they heard this text
Didn't see that as amazing
As God not wanting Abrahams sacrifice

They thought it was amazing
That a god would stop this sacrifice
And then give a person
Something to sacrifice in its place

Many ancient Palestinians
Saw this as a text about God's love
Not Abraham's faithfulness

**But my favorite is the Asian Minor Goddess

Kibula who controlled all things
Including the weather

And there is a record that one time
During a severe drought
Over 2000 men castrated themselves
And place their privates on the altar

Thinking if they were more like Kibula
She would allow it to rain

And you can insert your jokes about the choir here!

**No god had ever told their people
What they wanted
What would in fact
Make them happy

Until Leviticus
Where our God says
I don't want your blood
I don't want your babies
And I don't want your privates

This is all I want
Why God wants these things
I don't know,
You will have to ask him

But in Leviticus

God says this all I want
And I am pleased with that
And if it is still not raining
Don't think it is because I am angry
Don't blame me
You are okay

For the first time in the history of the world
A god told his people
Exactly what to do
To be in a right relationship

That is radical
But that is the history of God
Doing whatever it takes to reach his people

Whatever it takes
To let people know
God loves them

It didn't start at Christmas
God has done it since the beginning of time
And we need to understand that about our God
The one true God

God isn't angry
God isn't doing bad things to you
God loves you

And in the midst of the drought

In the midst of whatever is going on
Emmanuel
God is with you
God is on your side

That is the radicalness of Leviticus
That is reveals
The unexplainable
The unpredictable
The unconditional love of God
Found in Christ Jesus

**There is a world out there
Hurting and dying
And in need of a loving deity
That wants to care for them

And it is high time
The church teaches this world once and for all
That our God isn't angry

Our God has done everything
Since the beginning of time
To let us know he loves us

If it takes a son in a manger
If it takes writing down a few laws
So you don't have to sacrifice your family
Whatever it takes
Is what our God has

And will continue to do

*Epiphany reveals

Shows

that our God isn't angry

he loves us too much!!