



## The G.O.A.T. – Touchpoint for October 25, 2023

### Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18 (NRSVUE) Ritual and Moral Holiness

**19** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>“Speak to all the congregation of the Israelites and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

<sup>15</sup> “You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. <sup>16</sup> You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand idly by when the blood<sup>[a]</sup> of your neighbor is at stake: I am the LORD.

<sup>17</sup> “You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. <sup>18</sup> You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

### Matthew 22:34-40 (NRSVUE) The Greatest Commandment

<sup>34</sup> When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, <sup>35</sup> and one of them, an expert in the law, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” <sup>37</sup> He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup> This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

### Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

Let’s take a look at a couple of portions of the passages today. First, something from Leviticus as re-written in *The Message*.

“Don’t pervert justice. Don’t show favoritism to either the poor or the great. Judge based on what is right. Don’t spread gossip and rumors. Don’t just stand by when your neighbor’s life is in danger. Don’t secretly hate your neighbor. If you have something against him, get it out in the open otherwise, you are an accomplice in his guilt. I am God. Don’t seek revenge or carry a grudge against any of your people. Love your neighbor as yourself. I am God.”

Now, this was in Leviticus. The Book of Laws. I would assume a lawyer, in Jesus’ time, would know the laws and scriptures. In Matthew, we find a lawyer is asking Jesus which commandment is the greatest.

It seems ever since the beginning of time we have had an obsession over what and who the greatest is. I have a coffee cup that says I’m the greatest, according to my kids. We have sports jerseys with other people’s names on the back that says their favorite player is the greatest. I think back to Muhammed Ali. At the conclusion of one of his matches, he raises his arms in victory and yells into the camera, “I am the greatest!”

There are endless debates on sports shows about who is the greatest. We have award shows where people determine who is the best in every category. There are no programs where there is a discussion about how a performer expressed their unique gifts in ways that touch our hearts. There needs to be a survivor, a top chef. And it has even seeped into poetry writing with the slam competitions. Let’s face it: We live vicariously through who we pick as the greatest of all time. We refer to it as the G.O.A.T.

When the lawyer in Matthew asks Jesus, “What is the greatest commandment?” Jesus answers the lawyer by saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. “ He goes on to say that every law hangs on these two commandments.

How magnificent! So simple, but so difficult to remember and practice.

Jesus, in one fell swoop, ended all debate about who is the greatest. In Leviticus it ends with “I am the Lord.” “I Am” is the greatest. It was also read, when Moses was told who gave him the authority to lead the children out of Egypt, “Tell them I Am sent you,” Jesus says. I Am, the Lord, is the greatest.

Even Muhammad Ali said it: “I am the greatest of all time.” I’m just going to hope he meant the real I Am and for the right reason.

All the laws hang on these two commandments and those commandments defer to the real, genuine greatest of all time. I don’t know about you, but I’m getting goat bumps! What if all our efforts to legislate law in our personal lives and communal lives needed to be filtered by these two commandments? What would be different?

Today we witness incredible displays of people’s unique gifts. If we witness them live, we sit in wonder and awe. In that present moment, we don’t typically judge or compare them against any other performer. We just are fortunate to be there and see, in amazement.

In the movie *Elf*, Peter, the New York-born baby raised by Santa in the North Pole, returns to New York to find his real Father. He spends his first day amazed to drink what he believes is the best coffee in the world. He takes his new friend, Jovie, to the café to surprise her. He has Jovie close her eyes when she enters so she couldn’t see the sign out front. They got their coffee and he waited anxiously to see the look on her face. She sipped it and he says, “Can you believe it!?” Jovie appeared puzzled. Peter, in complete naiveté, pointed outside to the sign and said, “Look! It’s the world’s best coffee!”

I remember back when I was with the Suns, an evangelical organization asked me to come to a fundraising event. Deion Sanders would be the speaker, and there would be a celebrity at every table. All those who came to the event would have a chance to talk with the celebrities. Then the celebrity would be paraded on stage to tell his or her faith story, why they accepted Jesus. I just couldn’t attend. I felt weird endorsing Jesus like he was toothpaste. Two out of three doctors choose Jesus. Remember the Crest commercial?

The true goat, the only goat, does not need an NIL sponsor, or a PR firm.

Truth is what it is, whether we know it or not. What I glean from these incredible passages is that there is only one G.O.A.T. The great I Am. It is the pulse of inspiration beneath every breath and within nature’s movements. The divine presence invites us to swim in the affection of God and be immersed in the I Am’s love, for God and for others.

May the way we live and move and have our being tethered and balanced by these two commandments.

To the only G.O.A.T. be the glory, forever and ever.

**Amen**

## **Opening Songs**

### **Be Still**

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)  
Be still, know that I am God

### **Create in Me**

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.  
Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

## **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **In the Arms of God**

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugan, Michael Joncas)

*Refrain:* Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear.

Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear.

For the burden you carry will fade within God's care. Come and rest in the arms of God.

- 1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace.  
Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace. *Refrain*
- 2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains.  
God and God alone will be your soul's true rest. Fall in the arms of God. *Refrain*
- 3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care.  
God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God. *Refrain*

## **The Meal**

### **Lord's Prayer**

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

## **Benediction**

### **A Celtic Blessing**

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you,  
The guarding of loving Christ be on you,  
The guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you,  
to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life.  
The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ,  
The guarding of the Spirit be upon you.