

FROM THE PULPIT

Excerpts from messages being presented at area places of worship this weekend.

Rabbi Mordechai Levin, Beth El Synagogue

Western civilization has adopted several teachings and moral values of Judaism, but many people are not aware of it. Take, for instance, President Obama's remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast, where he said: "There is one law that binds all great religions together. Jesus told us to 'love thy neighbor as thyself.' The Torah commands, 'That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow.'"



Levin

Both phrases are Jewish teachings: the first one from the Hebrew Bible and the second from the Talmud. Many people believe that "love your neighbor as yourself" was first said by Jesus, not realizing

that he was simply quoting the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 19:18), written many centuries before his time.

The commandment "to love" occurs three times in the Hebrew Bible. First, love your neighbor as yourself, second, love the stranger as yourself (Leviticus 19:34), and finally, love God with all your heart (Deuteronomy 6:5).

What does it mean to love our neighbor? It doesn't refer to feeling love, but behaving in a loving way. The verse asks us to do unto others what we would have them do unto us, and to refrain from treating them unfairly. And this applies also to the "stranger," those who are not part of your group, nation or religion.

The Rev. Wenda Fry, Bethany Lutheran Church, Omaha

Have you ever noticed a discrepancy on one of your billing statements that caused you to call the customer service line? After punching in your account number, zip code and the last four digits of your Social Security number, you finally get a live customer rep who says, "How can I help you?"

After explaining the problem, the first words you hear the rep say are, "I apologize, let me take care of that right away." And while we may be glad the rep has apologized, we know they are trained to say these kinds of things. Is it really a genuine apology?

The season of Lent has begun, and Christians all over the world take on particular disciplines — fasting, prayer, works of love — in order to repent and conform their lives more closely to the life of Christ. Repentance literally means "change of mind," but there is more. It means that the change of mind issues in regret for past sins and in change of conduct for the better.



Fry

God loves when we apologize to Him and to those we have hurt, but He loves it even more when we take steps of action and accountability so that our repentance takes shape and form. May God bless your observance of Lent with His energy!

The Rev. Matt Nieman, First Presbyterian Church, Bellevue

Based on Genesis 9:8-17

For children who have repeatedly been abused by adults, it takes a long time to trust another adult not to do the same. They need to be convinced that new grown-ups in their lives will not be like the ones who previously hit them, kicked them or shouted at them repeatedly. Orphans, especially, need to be reassured that their new adoptive parents are there to love them with gentle hugs, soft-spoken affirmations and broad smiles.

It often takes an abused child a long

time to see a rainbow in the sky—to believe the promise of another adult that his or her presence will only bring love, protection and hope.

This kind of promise made by a loving and caring parent is like the promise that God made with humanity in Genesis 9, when God set the rainbow in



Nieman

the sky soon after the flood that destroyed the earth. The rainbow was the sign that never again would there be another such storm to wipe out the entire world.

God is at work placing modern-day rainbows — reminders of God's promise to sustain us — in front of us so that we can be assured that we will not face destruction; that our place in God's eternal care will always be preserved.