

THE BIBLICAL WILD

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WEEK VI: Exodus 37-Leviticus 12 /
Psalms 29-34

From Psalm 34: I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boasts in the Lord. Let the humble hear and be glad. O, magnify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together. AMEN.

In this week's readings, we conclude the Book of Exodus and move into the Book of Leviticus. Now, Leviticus has gotten a bad rap across the centuries. It's a collection of laws with particular details and some things that sound rather quaint to our modern ears. These are actually peripheral issues and not central to the thesis that the book presents. Let's look at Leviticus more from a mountaintop perspective rather than getting mired down in the deep issues of individual pieces of scripture.

The understanding about a system of sacrifice that God has commanded the people of Israel to implement was first introduced to us in the book of the Exodus. But as we move to Leviticus, what we find is that there is an elaboration, an enhancement, a more orderly kind of system that is developed.

In this system of sacrifice, it is easy to get bogged down in Leviticus with all sorts of details and wonder whether this requires one turtledove or two turtledoves. The key point for us to remember is that this system of sacrifice is a gracious gift from God that is an invitation for us to be in interaction, to be in relationship with God. And understand in this sacrifice that they were cleansing themselves of their sins and restoring their relationship to God.

As we move forward into the Christian era, we remind ourselves that what we do on a Sunday is that we gather together as a community in the abiding presence of God and we break bread and share wine around the table. An understanding of that as a sacrifice, as an opportunity for us to experience God's holiness, God's separateness, yet God's presence with us. It's also an opportunity for us to understand that because of this sacrifice, and because of God's gracious gift to us, and our relationship, interaction, communion with God, that we are called to mirror our lives on God's example – act in ways that strive for righteousness, faithfulness, mercy, justice, to restore society for reconciliation to occur between all of God's people.

In this system of sacrifice introduced in Exodus and refined in Leviticus, we see that the way that God's people are able to come into the midst of God's holy presence is only through the mediation of a special class of people – the priests of the temple. That is a notion that has been brought forth theologically and liturgically in an understanding of Holy Orders, of deacons, priests, and bishops in the church – that tension between a

mediated presence and direct presence of God is the heart of many religious understandings of various faith traditions and at the very heart of the English Reformation.

As Episcopalians who choose the middle way, we live in the tension between an understanding of the importance of having people trained, equipped, people who are called to act in somewhat of a mediatorial role and also a clear understanding that we can pray directly to God, have immediate access to God, and feel God's presence in our lives whether there's a priest involved or not.

I have two questions for you this week: When have you experienced presence in the midst of absence? When have you experienced God's presence in a mediated way? In an immediate way?

God bless and I will see you next week.