



CONSECRATED TO GOD

SERIES: THE TABERNACLE: GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE

Exodus 29:1-46
Seventh Message
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It has been one month since Donald Trump took office as the 45th President of the United States. In front of the Capitol, in the presence of family and dignitaries—members of Congress, Supreme Court justices, former Presidents—and observed by the crowds on the Mall, Chief Justice Roberts administered to him the presidential oath of office. As for any modern president, it had been a long road to the White House. Over the course of 19 months Trump went from candidate to nominee to President-elect. In the end it was the clock which made him President: at noon on January 20. The oath is the first act of a new President, necessary before he can exercise the other functions of office.

One of these functions is to assemble a Cabinet. We've seen the process multiple times during these weeks: nomination by the President, hearings before the relevant Senate committee, confirmation by the full Senate, and finally swearing-in, usually by Vice-President Pence. This last act of swearing-in is usually quickly arranged without much pomp or audience so that the Secretary can immediately get to work.

In the UK, transfer of political power happens much more quickly, as we saw last July. Hours after losing the Brexit vote last June, David Cameron announced that he would resign by October. But 19 days later he was gone, and without an election. He went to see the Queen and submitted his resignation. A half-hour later Theresa May went to see the Queen, who invited her to form Her Majesty's Government. Mrs May curtsied and that was it: she was Prime Minister.

Other installation ceremonies are largely that: ceremonial. During last week's services the elders commissioned a new elder. Though it was important for the elders to lay hands on him and pray for him, that did not make him an elder. He had joined the board a few weeks earlier.

Two weeks ago Queen Elizabeth II celebrated her Sapphire Jubilee, the 65th anniversary of her accession to the throne. On the death of her father King George VI in 1952, she immediately ascended the throne as Queen, and was proclaimed as such the same day. But the coronation was not until 16 months later. This was a lavish and richly symbolic ceremony in Westminster Abbey, officiated by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Elizabeth was anointed, robed, seated on the Coronation Chair which is over 700 years old, given the regalia of office, and crowned. The crucial moment was when the crown touched her head, but this did not make her Queen; she had been Queen already for 16 months.

These are some examples of how people are installed into office. Sometimes the ceremony itself confers office; sometimes it is just a ceremony, however richly symbolic.

In our series on the tabernacle, we come today to the instructions for the formal installation of the priests so that they can commence their service. The Lord had instructed Moses, "bring near to you

Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests" (Exod 28:1). The rest of chapter 28, which we looked at last week, contains instructions for the sacred vestments that Aaron and his sons would wear in their priestly service. Moving on, chapter 29 contains the Lord's instructions to Moses for the consecration and ordination of Aaron and his sons, for their installation into the office of priesthood.

"Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. Take one bull of the herd and two rams without blemish, and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers smeared with oil. You shall make them of fine wheat flour. You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, and bring the bull and the two rams. You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. Then you shall take the garments, and put on Aaron the coat and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod. And you shall set the turban on his head and put the holy crown on the turban. You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him. Then you shall bring his sons and put coats on them, and you shall gird Aaron and his sons with sashes and bind caps on them. And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever. Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons." (Exod 29:1-9 ESV)

These are the instructions; the actual ceremony is described in Leviticus 8. The ceremony is elaborate with multiple stages; each stage is necessary for the priests to commence their service. Moses is the officiant. He is to present, wash, clothe, anoint and ordain Aaron and his sons.

The ceremony begins with the presentation at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Moses is to present two types of offerings: three animals and three types of bread. The animals are to be *blameless* and the bread products are to be *unleavened*, indicating ceremonial cleanness and fitness for offering to God. Both types of offerings will be used in the final ordination stage of the ceremony. Moses is also to present Aaron and his sons. There at the entrance Moses will have already assembled the whole congregation of Israel (Lev 8:3-4), so they witness the proceedings.

The second stage is washing. In the courtyard of the tabernacle there are two items of furniture: the bronze altar (27:1-8) and the bronze basin (30:17-21). Once the priests are in office, they must wash their hands and feet in this basin whenever they approach the altar or enter the tent, "lest they die" (30:20). For this consecration ceremony a more thorough washing is required, and it is Moses who washes them. I assume Aaron and his sons are wearing only their linen underwear.

The third stage is vesting. Moses is to clothe Aaron with the high-priestly vestments: the white tunic, the blue robe, the multi-colored ephod, the breastpiece, and the sash; and on his head the turban and

on that the golden plate inscribed “Holy to the LORD.” He is also to clothe Aaron’s sons with their priestly vestments: white tunics, sashes and caps.

The fourth stage is anointing. The special anointing oil is made of the finest spices including myrrh and cinnamon blended with olive oil, the work of a perfumer (30:22-26). This oil will be used to anoint not only the priests but also the tent, the furniture and the utensils. This is sacred anointing oil, the Lord’s holy anointing oil. Anointing with this oil consecrates; it makes holy. Therefore it is not to be used for any profane purpose, lest one die.

The final stage is ordination. This is by far the longest stage (9b-37). It requires the sacrifice of the three animals, the bull and the two rams. For each sacrifice something is done with the blood and something with the body. Aaron and his sons are the offerers: they lay their hands on each animal (10, 15, 19), signifying their identification with the animal. It is being killed instead of them. It is a vicarious substitute in their place. Moses is the sacrificer: he kills each animal, manipulates the blood, and handles the body. This is the only time that Moses will play this priestly role, serving at the bronze altar. After Aaron and his sons are installed as priests, it is they who will do all the sacrificing.

The bull is sacrificed as a sin offering (10-14), for purification from uncleanness and expiation of sin. Moses is to daub some of the blood on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour the rest at the base of the altar. The choicest fattiest parts are burnt on the altar so that they go up in smoke towards God. The rest is burnt outside the camp.

The first ram is sacrificed as a burnt offering (15-18). Moses is to throw its blood against the altar, and burn the entire body so it all goes up in smoke to the Lord. This is what a burnt offering is: an ascension offering, where the entire animal ascends in smoke to heaven as an offering to God. It is “a pleasing aroma...to the Lord” (18), accepted by him.

The second ram is sacrificed as the ordination offering (19-34). The first two sacrifices have already been messy with the throwing of blood. Now it gets messier still. Moses is to do three things with the blood (20-21). First, he is to daub blood on the right ear lobes, on the right thumbs, and on the right big toes of Aaron and his sons. This consecrates these body parts to the Lord’s service: the ears to hear the word of the Lord, the hands to handle the sacrifices and the other sacred duties, and the feet to walk on the holy ground of the sanctuary. Moses is to throw the rest of the blood against the altar. Then he takes some of this blood from the altar and some anointing oil and sprinkles it on Aaron and his sons and on their garments. “He and his garments shall be holy, and his sons and his sons’ garments with him” (21). Aaron and his sons become sacred. Their garments become sacred vestments.

The handling of the body is also complicated (22-28). There is mention of “the breast of the wave offering...which is waved” and “the shoulder of the heave offering...which is heaved up” (27 KJV). What are wave and heave offerings, and what is special about the breast and the shoulder? The ram of ordination belongs to the larger category of peace or fellowship offerings (28). These are sacrifices of *shalom*, of well-being, in which all participate in eating: the Lord, the priests, and the offerer. The best parts are given to the Lord: the fatty parts are burnt on the altar so that they rise up in smoke. The breast and the right thigh are the next best parts; they are given to the priests. The breast is “waved” before the Lord, offered to him in

presentation, but then received back and given to the priests as their portion. The right thigh is raised up in presentation before the Lord then given to the sacrificing priest. The rest of the animal is eaten by the offerer. In this, the first fellowship offering, the right thigh is given to the Lord: it is burnt with the fatty portions. The breast is given to Moses. Aaron and his sons as the offerers eat the rest of the meat and the bread inside the courtyard as a fellowship meal in the Lord’s sanctuary.

There is an order to these three sacrifices: Aaron and his sons must first be purified from their sin and uncleanness in the sin offering. The burnt offering represents their complete dedication to the Lord; the whole animal goes up to God. The fellowship offering represents well-being (*shalom*) between God, sacrificer (Moses), and offerers.

After washing, robing, anointing, and seven days of ordination sacrifices, Aaron and his sons are finally consecrated as priests. They can now enter service handling the holy things of God in his holy sanctuary. And so the chapter ends with a description of the regular priestly duty of Aaron and his sons:

“Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight... It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD.” (38-42)

The priests are to offer a year-old lamb as a burnt offering: the whole animal goes up in smoke to heaven. They are to offer such a lamb every morning and every evening, every day, every year, in perpetuity.

The chapter ends with a reminder of the purpose of the tabernacle:

“...the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory. I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God.” (42-46)

This end of the main block of instructions for the tabernacle echoes the beginning (25:8-9): the tabernacle is where God dwells with his people as per his oft-repeated statement, “I will be your God, you will be my people, and I will dwell with you.” God graciously meets his people here at this place of sacrifice.

At the time of Jesus, priests were still offering up the daily sacrifices in the temple in Jerusalem, morning and evening, day after day, year after year. Forty years later in AD 70 the temple was destroyed, the priesthood was disbanded and the sacrifices ceased. Judaism would have to figure out how to carry on without a temple, without a priesthood, and without daily sacrifices. The sacrifices were replaced with prayer. The foundation for this had already been laid. The Jews already had three daily times of prayer; the morning and afternoon prayers coincided with the daily sacrifices.

Meanwhile the New Testament church had already transitioned to life without a temple, without priests and without daily sacrifices. The followers of Jesus quickly came to a radical understanding about these three elements that were so crucial to Jewish life. Though the temple still stood in Jerusalem, it was no longer the dwelling place

of God: the church was. Though Jewish priests still served in the temple, the church was the new priesthood. Though daily sacrifices were still offered in the temple, all followers of Jesus were offering a different sacrifice: they were offering themselves.

Temple, priesthood, sacrifices: all three terms are used in our Scripture reading:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession. (1 Pet 2:4-5, 11)

The New Testament church had no professionals. There was no special class of people consecrated to the Lord's service on behalf of the others. There was a radical equality: ethnic equality, gender equality, socioeconomic equality. They were all priests. We call this the priesthood of all believers. They had all been washed, clothed, anointed and ordained. They had all been washed: washed in the blood of Jesus which cleanses from all sin and uncleanness. They had all been clothed. We often talk of being clothed in Christ's righteousness, but it's more profound than that. We put off the old self, and we put on the new self. What is this new self? We put on Christ himself! As we are clothed in Christ we actually become like him. They had been anointed: filled with the Holy Spirit. They had been ordained: given spiritual gifts for ministry.

Unfortunately, the early church quickly reintroduced priests. Priests would become necessary for the Eucharist. Only a consecrated priest could consecrate the bread and the wine so that they become the body and blood of Jesus. A major divide developed between the laity and the ordained clergy; ordination to holy orders became a sacrament. Daily prayer developed into the divine office, the liturgy of the hours, performed by the monks. The laity had less and less to do with the life of the church.

This is 500th anniversary of Reformation, dated to October 31, 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. Luther recovered many Biblical truths that had been lost by the church in the previous thousand years. Among these was the idea of the priesthood of all believers. He gave up his holy orders as a monk, married a nun and started a family. He recovered the significance of regular work. He wrote hymns in German so the laity could sing. He recovered "ordinary" life and the priestly nature of ordinary life.

The priesthood of all believers, or the ministry of the saints, is important to us at PBCC. None of us on the pastoral staff is ordained; none of us is a Reverend. None of us has a professional ministerial degree. We are not clergy. We are like you; we're not a special class. Each one of us has been part of you; we've all come from the PBCC body. When we're not up here, we're sitting there with you. I have been part of various churches in different parts of the world; PBC has narrowest gap between the staff and the body of any church I've ever been in.

Foundational to our understanding of the ministry of saints are these two verses:

he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. (Eph 4:11-12)

This is often understood as Christ giving pastor-teachers to the church to do three things: equip the saints, do the work of ministry, and build up the body of Christ. The pastors are paid to do all the work. But we read it as Christ giving pastor-teachers to do one thing: equip the saints. Then we all do the work of ministry towards the building up of the church. This has been a foundational text since the earliest days of PBC. The ministry of the saints is one of our core values.

What initiates you to ministry to serve as a priest? Do you have to go through special courses or get degrees? No, there are two basic qualifications: you must be in Christ and you must have the Spirit in you. In Christ: you have been washed. Filled by his Spirit: you are in the process of putting on Christ, transformed in your very being; you are anointed as saints; and you are ordained, given spiritual gifts.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. (1 Cor 12:4-6)

All of us have spiritual gifts, all of us have service and activity to do. What does it look like when the saints all work together like a fine-tuned machine? We're not a fine-tuned machine! We're just ordinary people with foibles, weaknesses and failure. Instead we have a fine-tuned engine: it is the triune God who drives all this. The Spirit gives the gifts, the Lord receives the service, and God makes it all happen. Our goal is not to be a fine-tuned machine but to have God at work in and among us. What then happens?

for building up the body of Christ...we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph 4:15-16)

Rooted in Christ, the body makes the body grow!

What does it mean for us to be priests today? We have a priestly role within the temple, within the church body. We've each been given spiritual gifts to serve within the body. There are many things we can do to help each other with love, care, encouragement and practical helps. And we can eat together! The New Testament church ate together: both communion and the love feast.

We are also priests to the world outside. Priests are mediators between the life-giving God and the world which needs to encounter that life. We have many things to offer: our time, interest in people, love and compassion, especially for the weak, vulnerable and at-risk. And we can eat: sharing a meal breaks down barriers.

We are citizens of heaven. Many Christians understand this as meaning we don't really belong here, we're on our way to heaven. But this misunderstands what it means to be a colony. The point of a colony is to extend the influence of the homeland. The church is a colony of heaven to extend the influence of heaven on earth. Our primary identity is in heaven not on earth. Our primary identity is not national or ethnic or political or gender or generational or socio-economic. Our primary identity is that we are in Christ. But we are present on earth to be a blessing to all those around us. God intends the church to be good for the world.

We are consecrated to God to be his priests. One of our priestly activities is to pray, so let us close with the prayer attributed to St Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.

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