WEEK 8
Nov. 1 - 8, 2026

Daily Bible readings

Exodus 28:1 - 40:38

Meeting God
Monday, Nov. 2
Exodus 28:1 – 29:46

As we wade into the rules for sacrifices it's easy to just let our eyes glaze over. In a world where we put cloth on the altar to protect it from even a drop of spilled grape juice (and then often add plastic on top to protect the cloth), the concept of splashing blood and burning animals is pretty foreign.

In fact, this is the first place I've pastored where I feel sure that most church members have witnessed an animal being butchered, or even done it themselves.

The gifts we put on the altar are a lot less personal. Most of us have left even germ-laden currency behind for neater checks, or bypass the altar altogether with electronic giving.

But as you read here (and many, many other places) about sacrifices, consider what they really meant to the people who gave them. A goat or lamb or grain or whatever wasn't something you bought—it was something that cost you a lot of expense and effort to raise, with the promise that it would provide you food or clothing directly, or other things in trade.

Giving it up, even burning it, was an extravagant gift that not only showed your obedience to God but also your trust that God wouldn't let you go without as a result of your sacrifice. As with the manna, it required trusting God to provide not only today, but also tomorrow.

We're also getting into teachings about the priesthood.

Christians, especially Protestants, accept as unquestioned truth that God is accessible to anyone, any place, at any time.

The ancient Israelites didn't have this view. In their understanding, God's appearances were limited and, until now, irregular.

In their understanding, the priesthood would give people more regular access to God, not directly, but through divinely chosen individuals.

As God said in 29:42-43, "There I will meet you and speak to you; there also I will meet with the Israelites."

The Tent of Meeting is consecrated by God as the place, and Aaron and his sons are priests.

In short, the priests are the communicators through whom God speaks to the people, and the people speak to God.

One of the most significant, but often overlooked, events of Good Friday is recorded in three gospels. Mark says, "The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."

It was the curtain that separated the rest

Daily reflections by Rev. Mark Fleming

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of the temple from the area where priests, and only selected priests in limited circumstances, could meet God to hear God speak.

With the crucifixion, God tears open that veil. Notice it is torn from top to bottom. It is God who reveals himself, not the people who find him.

Monday meditation
Proverbs 10:1

A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother.

Prayer focus

Let me see you clearly, Lord; remove whatever gets in the way.

Scent from God
Tuesday, Nov. 3
Exodus 30:1 – 31:18

As we continue to read through the laws concerning worship—not just today but also in later passages—pay attention to the sensory richness of the experience.

Today's passage has a lot about the smells of worship. There would have been ambient smells already, both pleasant and unpleasant. To those are being added the aroma of the anointing oil with its blend of spices and the smell of the burning incense. Each of these have formulas provided that are exacting and not to be used for anything else but worship.

Distinctive smells can bring strong emotional responses. Think of how you might feel if you catch a whiff of the perfume your mother wore, or the smell of a hot summer day. I'll sometimes come across the smell of whatever cleaning chemicals were used in my first-grade classroom and suddenly remember what it was like to be there.

God understands humans…he made them.

Each of these instructions, from the smells to the colors and textures and sounds, are intended to focus the people's thoughts on worship. They each have the ability to bring a response, sometimes very different responses. Some encourage awe, others comfort.

These physical prompts to worship were important in a time when most of the people couldn't read or write, but they also speak to us in a way that can go beyond intellectual understanding.

In reading passages like this, don't just try to imagine what it would have looked like, or smelled like or sounded like, but try to imagine what it would have felt like: what emotions would it have brought out? You might find some clues for how to deepen your own worship or prayer experience.

We also read about the Sabbath—the day of rest that God commanded. "Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy."

The Sabbath serves to remind us of creation as we recall that God himself rested on the seventh day. It also calls us to stop, rest and reflect. When life gets busy, it's easy to get overwhelmed and believe that it all depends on us. Taking a sabbath gives us the perspective that the world goes on, even without our efforts.

Jesus tells us that the Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath. Even so, some will try to make a command to step back and rest into a legalistic exercise in itself, defining what may or may not be done on the Sabbath, or insisting it is one day rather than another.

Paul had words of wisdom about that in Colossians 2:16-17. "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."

Tuesday meditation
Proverbs 10:2-5

Ill-gotten treasures have no lasting value, but righteousness delivers from death.

The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.

Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.

He who gathers crops in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.

Prayer focus

Lord, as I pray and worship, let me experience you in your fullness.

The golden calf
Wednesday, Nov. 4
Exodus 32:1 – 33:6

Even as God is providing direction to Moses as to how the people are to worship him, back at the camp they are growing impatient.

Much later a psalmist will write "Be still and know that I am God…" (Psalm 46:10), but both stillness and recognition that God is God require discipline and maturity that's difficult to master. The people are unsure they can trust Moses and this God he speaks of, so they return to more familiar ways.

What we see called a "calf" is probably a young bull, similar to the Egyptian god Apis. To the Egyptians this was a god of power and fertility whose worship would have looked much like the raucous scene Moses and Joshua returned from the mountain to find.

While both Moses and God are angry at this unfaithful display, Moses is quick to intercede on behalf of the people. God first says he will destroy the people and start over with Moses as the founder of a great nation (similar to what happened with Noah and the ark).

Yet, when Moses pleads for the lives of the people, God listens. "Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened."

There is still punishment in the form of many deaths and a plague, but the extended family of Abraham lives on to eventually make its way to the promised land. God's promise and his people live on, injured but not destroyed.

This is far from the first, or last, time we will see God's anger reduced by the pleas of a righteous follower. If there were ever a reminder of the importance of the faithful lifting up prayers of intercession, this is it.

Wednesday meditation
Proverbs 10:6-7

Blessings crown the head of the righteous, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.

The name of the righteous is used in blessings, but the name of the wicked will rot.

Prayer focus

Make me righteous, O Lord. Cleanse me from every desire to sin and from every bit of anger or hatred I feel toward those around me, both near and far.

Face-to-face with God
Thursday, Nov. 5
Exodus 33:7 – 34:35

The Tent of Meeting spoken of today doesn't seem to be the same as we read about earlier in Exodus, which was a precisely built tent at the center of the community where worship was based—but the purpose is the same.

The phrase as it's used in today's passage refers to a tent Moses pitched outside the camp, where he met God and where the people would come to him for guidance.

We don't know exactly how God and Moses met with one another. The pillar of cloud stood at the entrance to the tent while Moses and Joshua were inside.

Here we read that "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend."

Exactly what he means isn't clear, as he asks in 33:18 for God to "show me your glory," apparently meaning he wants God to appear visibly. God agrees, but to protect Moses, does not allow Moses to see God's face—he must hide in a cleft of the mountain until God passes, and only see God from behind.

This is not the first time that we've been told that humans can't see God face-to-face, as God's glory would overwhelm them to the point they would not survive. That

will change, though, after humans have seen God's face in the person of Jesus.

Paul refers to this Exodus passage in 2 Corinthians 3, when he said, "We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away."

We do know, though, that Moses had a special connection with God during those times in the Tent of Meeting. It was only much later that all of humanity got to share the same kind of experience.

After the arrival of Christ, a full encounter with God becomes transformative rather than overwhelming. As Paul continues in 3:18, "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

Thursday meditation
Proverbs 10:8

The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.

Prayer focus

God, let me see you face-to-face, in the face of Christ, and in the faces of my brothers and sisters in the faith.

Sacrificing time
Friday, Nov. 6
Exodus 35:1 – 36:38

Earlier when we were reading about sacrifices I mentioned how much of an act of faith they were. While we think of the Sabbath mainly as a break from work when we can rest, it also represents a sacrifice that requires faith.

For most of us, time is the most valuable resource we have. We sell our time to an employer in order to get the money we need to live, we show devotion to our loved ones through devoting time to them and we require time to do all the business (and busyness) of living. At the end of all that, we have little left over and want to guard it jealously.

But that's the problem. As with animal and grain sacrifices, God doesn't ask for some part of what's left over. He demands a commitment of the best: the perfect animals, the firstfruits of the crops, and a full one-seventh of our life devoted to doing nothing but recognizing that God is God, and worshiping him for it.

Notice that the building of the tabernacle (we're back to the formal Tent of Meeting now), doesn't come from the sacrifices, but rather from freewill offerings. In 35:21 we read, "everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments."

This wasn't like the golden calf, for which gold had been required. These were gifts freely given. They weren't just a way to build a place of worship—the act of giving was itself an act of worship. The required sacrifices were acts of obedience, requiring people to relinquish their resources and trust God. Here we have acts of joy, giving people the opportunity to celebrate God.

Friday meditation
Proverbs 10:9-11

Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out.

Whoever winks maliciously causes grief, and a chattering fool comes to ruin.

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

Prayer focus

Grant me the wisdom to know what a life of integrity requires, and the strength to live it. Let me share joyfully, as both obedience and as an act of celebration and worship.

Closer and closer to God
Saturday, Nov. 7
Exodus 37:1 – 38:30

The design of the Tent of Meeting is a smaller and simpler version of what we will one day see in the Temple at Jerusalem.

At the very heart of it is the ark—a box that contains the stone tablets the law is written on. (The word "ark" refers to a large box. Its modern usage is usually related to either the Ark of the Covenant we read about here or Noah's Ark. In a synagogue the box containing the scrolls of the Torah is called an ark. "Ark" can also be used to refer to a place of safety or refuge, from the ark used for protection from the great flood.)

The Ark of the Covenant was kept behind a curtain in a tent (the tabernacle). The curtain separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (26:34). A courtyard surrounded the whole tent, with the altar of sacrifice between the entrance gate and the tabernacle.

While the Temple will be both more elaborate and contain more layers, the essential plan is the same—the presence of God is approached in stages, with each level more exclusive.

With the idea here that God is deep within the Temple, with layers of protection keeping the common people away from his holiness, we begin to see one of the reasons Jesus was so unexpected. There are very few times in his life that he goes to the Temple, and he is always approaching it from the outside, not coming from inside the Most Holy Place where God was thought to live.

In the theology of Temple worship, all that most people could ever hope for was to approach near to God's presence, and perhaps see one of the holy men who had full access. We read of the fine materials of the inner sanctum, with the place for common people given almost as an afterthought: "Next they made the courtyard."

With Jesus, God wasn't buried deep under layers of protective wrapping, but was out among his people…especially among the least of his people. God didn't need protecting—even when the worst happened and Jesus was killed—God turned that defeat into victory, and showed that he didn't need protection, but that he gave protection.

Saturday meditation
Proverbs 10:12

Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.

Prayer focus

Thank you for giving us direct access to you, O Lord, no longer through intermediaries.

On the road again
Sunday, Nov. 8
Exodus 39:1 – 40:38

A lot happened in the 40 chapters of Exodus. Yet, if this were a movie, you would know the ending is intended for a sequel.

Chapter 1 began with the Israelites in captivity in Egypt. It ends, not in the Promised Land, but on a journey. They've traded the predictable certainty of slavery for an unpredictable adventure.

Even though they have left where they lived for generations and have not yet arrived at the place God is preparing for them, they are now home, for they are now following God.

All the preparations for the tent of meeting, with its furnishings and structure and outfitting the priests needed one more thing: God's presence. Now that they have prepared, God arrives to meet them.

"The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them."

Even when we have met God and known him, we experience times when we don't see God except as a memory of past experience and a hope for future experience. The people have seen this happen, and reacted in different ways, just as we all do.

When Moses was with God on the mountain, they reacted out of fear. Maybe the God who had saved them once was through

with them. Maybe the God who changed the hardened heart of Pharaoh was left behind in Egypt and had not come with them into this desolate land. Maybe Moses, and the angel that led them, weren't up to the task at hand.

In that instance they responded by reverting to the old ways and made themselves a God. Aaron, who was supposed to be speaking for God, instead gave in to his own fear and doubts and went with the familiar instead of the faithful. They made themselves a god. Like any god made by human hands and imaginations, it wasn't big enough to save them.

During all this time they have been building the ark and the tabernacle, we don't see God speaking to them—yet they act out of faith, continuing to follow the commands God had already provided. They acted with confident expectation that, if they did what God had told them to, they could once again be assured of God's presence and direction.

And it worked.

The tabernacle is built, and God fills it with his presence.

He stays with them for a season, then moves on, trusting they will follow, and they do.

That's what home is when you live in the kingdom of God.

Sunday meditation
Proverbs 10:13-14

Wisdom is found on the lips of the discerning, but a rod is for the back of one who has no sense.

The wise store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin.

Prayer focus

Grant me the confidence to be able to feel at home wherever you lead.