

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;  
I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*

During the coronavirus pandemic, I have been reading through the Daily Old Testament Lectionary readings from Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. It's been a rich journey, shaping my thoughts, prayers, and teaching more than I expected. Last Sunday I preached on Luke 24:13-35, the Road to Emmaus. As I pondered vv. 26-27 ("Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself"), I was grateful for the many times when my stroll through Moses triggered insights about Jesus, especially as I was reflecting on Numbers 19.

Numbers 18 and 19 are yet another round of detailed instructions for Israel's priests and Levites. Alongside fourteen other distinct chapters in these three books, they add to laws governing the ritual activities of priests and Levites as they lead tabernacle worship. These chapters specifically describe their rigidly bound duties and reinforce elaborate requirements for purification. When I finished reading those chapters, I closed my Bible and turned to Sally, "Whew! I cannot imagine how complicated a Manual for Sacrificial Worship and Priestly Ministry would be if you pulled all sixteen chapters together and wrote it up as a separate document. It would make the most intense, granular company HR manual look wimpy in comparison." (Anybody up to attempt **Jewish Priesthood for Dummies?**)

These in-depth laws and regulations for Jewish worship engender two deep responses in me.

First, God's holiness, and all the steps that guard his holiness, and protect us from violating that holiness, are far more important and awesome than we imagine. Think of God's holiness the next time you're at a stoplight and glance over at the high, barbed-wire-topped fences surrounding large-scale electrical transformers. They shout, "Stay Away! Danger!" Or reread Exodus 19-20 and consider all the ways God himself protected his people from the terrifying power of his own holiness.

Second, I am overwhelmingly thankful for Jesus. We will never understand how he specifically fulfilled the entire Jewish sacrificial system and subsumed within himself all the restrictive demands of priestly holiness. But he did. He wrapped all the religious demands of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers into himself. His one sacrifice for sin, for all time, for all people, completed what all the sacrifices ever offered could not.

The resurrection of Jesus was God's great **Amen!** to the fulfillment of the demands of his own holiness: Hebrews 9:23-10:14 expounds this truth.

I can imagine Jesus walking alongside Cleopas and Mary toward their home in Emmaus and saying, again and again, "I finished that. That blood offering? I fulfilled that. That thank-offering of grain and drink? I fulfilled that. That moment when the high priest laid his hand on the head of the goat? That happened in me, too. The weeks of ritual purification, the multiple washings, the blood on the ear and the thumb and the big toe?"

All done. I fulfilled it all. It's done." All that's left is the peace of reconciliation and the gift of righteousness before the throne of God.

By all logic, these musings do not the lessen the importance of God's holiness. It simply makes me grateful that the Law's impossible demands have been satisfied and draws me toward a life of loving allegiance to Jesus. I am renewed to live in a way that pleases and honors the One who enables me to shut my Bible after Numbers 19 with a smile (rather than adding impossible, detailed duties to my priestly job description).

It is beyond my understanding to know how it all happened. But the Gospel declares resoundingly, TETELESTAI – "It is finished!" Ephesians 2:1-10 outlines how God, in Christ, has set us free from the death-grip of the Prince of this World and has made us alive together with Christ. Ephesians 2:11-16 takes our redemption further: "He himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances . . ."

The Law of Ordinances is fulfilled. Completed. Finished. Therefore, I worship with hope and gratitude before the Throne of God.

I'm looking forward with hope to that reunion of worship with you in body as well as spirit. I am also looking forward to taking my place alongside the angels, archangels and all the company of heavenly saints who forever sing the threefold hymn of praise, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty!" Even now this earthly and heavenly reunion come together in this life, in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, when the local church gathers around the Table each Sunday and enters into the ever-present finished work of Jesus.

We have much to look forward to, don't we?

Take time today to express your love and gratitude to Jesus for wrapping up all the demands of the ordinances in himself and offering us in return the gift of completed righteousness.

Grace and peace in Jesus,

Bishop Steve