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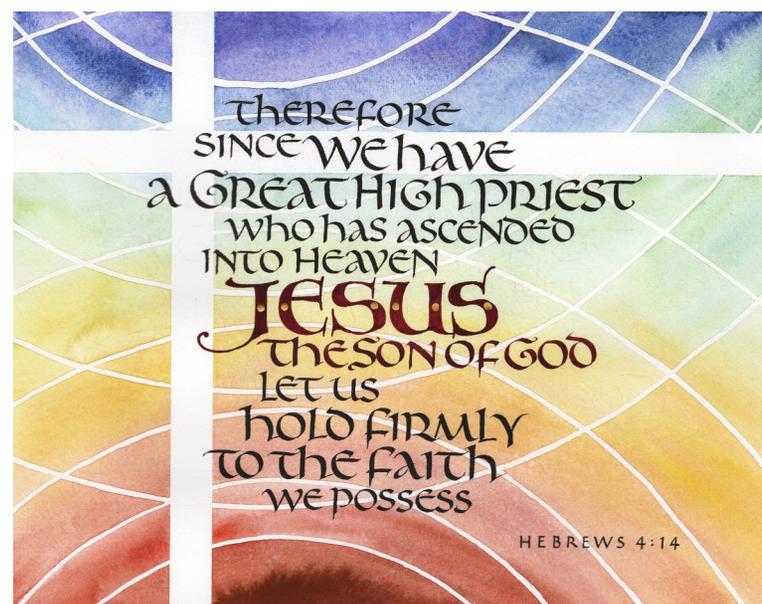
DANIEL & ALENA GUAGENTI

COVER ART

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IT IS FINISHED

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PRIESTHOOD



LENTEN DEVOTIONS ON

HIGH PRIEST ZADOK
THE SIN OFFERING
YOM KIPPUR

AHAZ' ABOMINATION
EZRA BALANCES THE YOKE
NADAB AND ABIHU

“THE SONS OF ZADOK WHO KEPT CHARGE OF MY SANCTUARY WHEN THE PEOPLE WENT ASTRAY FROM ME, SHALL COME NEAR TO ME.”

EZEKIEL 44:15

HIGH PRIEST ZADOK

Zadok was possibly the greatest of the Levitical priests, next to Aaron. You might wonder why this is. You might also wonder who Zadok was! Don't be discouraged if you don't remember him. As great a priest as Zadok was, he was only a supporting character in other people's stories.

Zadok sided with David against Absalom. He was also loyal to Solomon. Zadok was the high-priest when the temple was built, and the first to serve there. God promised that Zadok's descendants would serve as high-priests after him. But Zadok was not the king; he was only loyal to the kings. Zadok did not build the temple; Zadok only worked there. Zadok was not responsible for making his descendants high-priests; God did that. As great a priest as Zadok was, he was never the main character of the story.

This illustrates something about priests. Compare the priesthood to other offices in the Old Testament. Prophets, kings, judges, patriarchs: these are big, active, important roles. These people did courageous things and delivered new words from God. But priests don't do exciting things or speak new words—not if they're any good! A good priest just shows up and follows the directions given in the Torah. A good priest is merely faithful.

That's why Zadok was a great priest. He was faithful to the Word. This is also how you will be great. Like Zadok, you are a priest (I Pet. 2:9). Your king, Jesus, has won the kingdom for you and declared you great, His own holy people (I Pet. 2:10). He has accomplished the most important work of salvation so that we don't even have new sacrifices to offer. His sacrifice covers all. All that remains is to follow in His faithful wake. In faithfulness to the Word, you will be great, too.

By Rev. Jonathan Mueller

WE PRAY

*Holy Lord, You have called us to follow the example of our priest, Christ. Like Zadok, may we be found faithful, and therefore great.
Amen.*

“AND FIRE CAME OUT FROM BEFORE THE LORD AND CONSUMED THEM AND THEY DIED BEFORE THE LORD.”

LEVITICUS 10:1-3

NADAB AND ABIHU

A wise pastor once said that the liturgy of the church is the set of words we have found are safe to use in the presence of the Lord. Say anything else and we might be struck dead. If you are tempted to think that is hyperbole, consider the case of Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron. They enter the tent of worship to offer sacrificial incense and are, quite literally, fired. All because their offering is “strange,” “alien,” “foreign” or, as the ESV puts it, “unauthorized.”

The people of Israel had spent too much time in Egypt surrounded by the unauthorized worship of foreign gods. The Lord laid down strict rules about worship to change their understanding of what worship is all about. The biggest change was one of attitude. We do not devise forms of worship that convince God to show mercy. We approach God, rather, as the one who already desires to show mercy.

Few people walk into a church sanctuary these days concerned that they might not come out again. Pastors add (or eliminate) rituals and words from worship services all the time with impunity. We have, in a sense, the opposite problem to Nadab and Abihu. We have so embraced the notion of God being merciful that we are in danger of accepting it as commonplace and not receiving it with awe. As singer-songwriter Nicole Nordeman puts it in her song “Tremble,” “Have I come too casually? Because it seems to me there's something I've neglected. How does one approach a Deity with informality and still protect the Sacred?”

The lesson of Nadab and Abihu is that we dare never forget the cost of God's mercy, which is the death of His Son for our iniquities. The lesson is repeated in the words of Psalm 130:3-4: “If You, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness, that You may be feared.”

By Rev. Charles St-Onge

WE PRAY

Gracious Father, help us to approach You with reverence as the God who delivers from sin and death through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

“IT SHALL BE A SABBATH OF SOLEMN REST, AND YOU SHALL AFFLICT YOURSELVES.”

LEVITICUS 23:28-32

YOM KIPPUR

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, was the most important day of the Hebraic calendar. It was a day commanded by God as an annual call to repentance. The idea of atonement was to make reconciliation for past sins through special sacrifices in order to restore and renew the relationship of God’s people to their Lord.

Today we do not observe the Day of Atonement. We do not make sacrifices as part of an annual call to repentance to reconcile ourselves before the Lord. We don’t have to. This is because God, our heavenly Father, has reconciled us to Himself by sending His Son, Jesus, into the world to be the saving sacrifice for our sin-sick souls. Jesus’ death on the cross is the final and full atonement for your sins. He has redeemed you before the Father, and in Him your relationship with God is restored and renewed.

The joy of our life in Christ is that this relationship is restored and renewed not just annually but each and every day. In the baptismal grace that has been poured out upon you, you can, with contrite and repentant hearts, lay your sins at the foot of the cross and know that they have been forgiven for Jesus’ sake. In Jesus, every day becomes a day of atonement for us. But while our sins are washed away daily in the waters of our baptism, it is good and right that we should set aside a time, like the Israelites of old, in which we purposely and knowingly focus on our need for God’s mercy and grace. We especially give thanks for the blessings we have in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thus we observe and celebrate the season of Lent.

By Rev. Rich Gizynski

WE PRAY

Dear heavenly Father, we give thanks that You have reconciled us to Yourself through the saving work of Your Son, Jesus. Keep us ever mindful of our need for Your grace and thankful for Your love, but especially so this Lent. Amen.

“HE EVEN BURNED HIS SON AS AN OFFERING, ACCORDING TO THE DESPICABLE PRACTICES OF THE NATIONS.”

2 KINGS 16:1-4

AHAZ’ ABOMINATION

Churchmen concern themselves with treading the hedge between sacred and commonplace, and children occur right at the intersection. Parenting, like priesthood, trafficks in heavenly treasures and handles holy things. From Genesis 3 to Revelation 12, from Moses to Jesus, offspring embody spiritual realities. Father Almighty deduces much about our devoutness from how we deal with children: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27).

Ahaz rightly recognized that kids and religion go together. However, Ahaz sinned in seeing sons and daughters as human commodities. Liquidating his own offspring in pursuit of personal and political profit ordained him as an agent of Satan.

Our day’s abortion advocacy amounts to no less despicable an idolatry. Babies do not arrive as entitlements, accessories, or possessions, but as gifts and privileges. Little ones belong to the Lord. He opens or closes wombs where and when it pleases Him. He considers our conduct toward these precious treasures as tantamount to treatment of Himself: “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me” (Matt. 18:5).

Circumcision prefigured what baptism proclaims. Only one Child suffices for a sacrifice to secure our salvation. The one Offspring of Eve, the one Descendent of Adam, the one Son of Man and Son of God, the singular sign promised even to Ahaz, Jesus satisfies the sweltering wrath we have kindled. In His incarnation, crucifixion, and rising to life again, priesthood and procreation finally converge. His obedient labors conceive and deliver forgiveness for all our sonship shortcomings and fatherhood failures. It enlists us in a consecrated vocation where children mediate as much of the divine unto us as we minister it unto them.

By Rev. Michael Salemink

WE PRAY

Father Almighty, embrace and discipline us into precious daughters and sons fit for eternal life in Your heavenly kingdom together. Amen.

“AND HE SHALL LAY HIS HAND ON THE HEAD OF THE SIN OFFERING AND KILL THE SIN OFFERING IN THE PLACE OF THE BURNT OFFERING.”

LEVITICUS 4:1-35

THE SIN OFFERING

There are many details concerning all the sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus 1-7, e.g., the specific animal or item sacrificed, the manipulation of the blood, which parts are burned and which parts consumed. But there are two principles to keep in mind amidst the details:

- 1) The sacrifices are prescribed and given *by God* for the well being of the community of God's people. The sacrifices were not invented by people to “keep God happy,” nor to express what humans imagined to be their own worthy sacrifices.
- 2) All the Old Testament sacrifices are fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus Christ. As Christians live in community, they see the sacrifices from before Jesus to be folded into our relationship with God and others.

The sin offering is one of two types of atonement sacrifices. It is a *mandatory* offering to cover unintentional sin (mistakes or ignorance) and ritual defilement. The sin offering provided the means for restoring a person whose ways or conditions have undermined the relations between God and his people.

The specific animal sacrificed varied according to the stature of the one making the offering. Much of the victim was burned on the altar, but some parts were consumed by the priests. Any flesh left over was to be burned *outside* the camp. Also, the blood of the victim was handled differently, some of it smeared on the horns of the altar, and some sprinkled on the veil covering the Holy of Holies.

The ultimate sin offering was on the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest offered two goats for the sins of the people. The Day of Atonement is fulfilled on Good Friday when Jesus paid the mandatory price for the sin of the world. In faith, we go *outside* the camp to Calvary to offer praise and thanksgiving to our Savior.

By Rev. Ron Richeson

WE PRAY

O God, You have given all people the means for restoration after straying from Your ways. Help us to resist the temptations to deny or justify our errors, and to receive remission of our sin. Amen.

“THEN ALL WHO TREMBLED... GATHERED AROUND ME WHILE I SAT APPALLED UNTIL THE EVENING SACRIFICE.”

EZRA 9:1-15

EZRA BALANCES THE YOKE

The temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed and the people cast into exile for one reason above all others: idols and pagan gods were allowed in the temple. You put other gods before God's presence, and He will fix the situation. Drastically.

Ezra was priest in the days when the exiles returned. He had taught them the Word, the Law of Moses. And yet, what did he hear? Once again the Israelites were mixing with the local pagans. They were marrying; they were merging. They weren't remaining separate as the people who would produce the Messiah, but living according to lust and the desire for wealth and power. Ezra lamented and called out for repentance, lest they be destroyed again.

The problem with the Israelites intermarrying was not that Gentiles are bad or unloved by God. Not at all. Rather, in the world there is distinction. There has to be. It is in Christ and only in Christ that these distinctions fall away. Where there is faith and forgiveness, there can be union. Where there is no faith, sin and death remain. We are not to go play around in sin and death, no matter how appealing it looks.

Christ Jesus is our great High Priest. With His righteousness, He gives us the true and holy wedding, where He calls us into His Church, washes us clean in baptism, and joins Himself to us for all eternity. Only in Christ can we all be truly one again.

By Rev. Eric Brown

WE PRAY

Lord Jesus, living in Your age of grace, may we never take for granted the preaching and practice of Your Gospel. Rather, brighten our eyes toward this light, that we may continue the work of filling the new temple of Jesus' body. Amen.