

May 17 & 18, 2025

Shaped and Shattered | *Come Near*

Leviticus 1:1, Leviticus 9:1-5, Mark 1:14-15

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We can all get caught up in the belief that God is distant, away somewhere pulling levers for this person or that situation. God spends a lot of time in the book of Leviticus and elsewhere claiming to not be distant but to be near, accessible. That is good news to those who feel that they have been oppressed and troubling news to those who are oppressing others.

Years ago, my brother and I were in a conversation about leadership and change. My brother is a retired naval commander, and he typically has lots of advice. One day he spent some time talking to me about the changes that come when an enlisted person attains the rank of chief. He said that typically two things happen. Your uniform changes and along with that you will be reassigned. The reasoning was that once you attained the rank of chief you were now a new person. You no longer were an enlisted person but all of the other enlisted people you had previously worked with may not be able to see you in that new role. They may only be able to see the old you, not the new you and may not give you the respect your new rank demands.

When I think about these slaves coming out of Egypt, this story from my brother comes to mind. A group of people who were slaves for generations, have now been freed, how do they live into their new world. How do they see each other? It's as if they have all been given new uniforms. How do they wear them? If we read much of the Old Testament we find that there are many who cannot adjust to this new identity. But it's not for a lack of trying on God's part.

It's like getting your orders. Who gives the orders? And what are these orders? How should the world be ordered? Who decides? In Egypt the people only new empire. Remember? The battle with God and Pharaoh was about Empire or Shalom. Empire, the survival of the fittest. In empire you don't care

for the widow the orphan or the immigrant. In Empire you leave the most vulnerable behind. God desires Shalom where the most vulnerable are cared for, placed in the middle with the strong surrounding them to protect them. It's clear from that moment on that God desires shalom and throughout the book of Leviticus we read that God decides for freedom over oppression. Generosity over selfishness. Care over neglect. Justice over Injustice.

God decides that there will be a new order and this people in their time and in their place were going to be the ones to embody that order. This new order wouldn't just be an idea, but it would find itself lived out in flesh and bone. And this new order is still, in our time and in our place, seeking to find new people who are called, who are Vayikra'd to live it out. That is you and me... we are the flesh and bone who are called to live out this new ordering of the world. We are called to freedom over oppression. Generosity over selfishness. Care over neglect. Justice over Injustice. Each of us... new uniforms.

And to do all of this God is going to enter the world in a brand-new way. God is going to enter a relationship with us. History is filled with stories of people all over the world trying to get God's attention. Whatever God or God's they worship, human beings have been trying desperately to get the attention of their deity. A few years ago my family and I vacationed in the Cancun area (that's where the stretchy incident happened) and we spent a day at Chichen Itza, one of the 7 wonders of the world, and its purpose was for the ruling class to hold religious ceremonies to try to attract the attention of their God's, in particular, the rain God. They were so desperate to get the attention of the God's that human sacrifice was a routine part of ceremonies.

But these folks weren't the only ones desperately seeking the attention of the God's. Cultures around the world engaged in all kinds of religious ceremonies to catch the eye and favor of the God's. But the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who became one of us in Jesus and sends Jesus into the world to, not to condemn but to save the

world, is totally different. The God we gather to worship is a God who calls to the people to come near. Calls the people to create a tabernacle – a tent of meeting – not a tent of judgment – not a tent of destruction – but a tent of meeting – where the people never have to wonder where their God is, ever again. We are going to get into more detail about what happens at the tent of meeting in the coming weeks, but the simple fact is that God instructs Moses, the leader of the people to build it with precision – connecting it to creation itself and places this structure, this tent of meeting right in the middle of the people.

It's almost annoyingly present. And God can be annoying, and I will add another, maybe even more accurate word, convicting. Because we want to wear those old uniforms. We don't always live up to the new order that God has given to us. Empire is so seductive. Shalom is hard. But there... is... God. Always there.

So, what do we do with something that we know to be true, staring at us right in the face, but is annoying or convicting? We deny it. We lie about it. We avoid it. We seek out voices that will tell us what we want to hear. They tell us that wearing the old uniform is just fine. They will even twist it so far as to tell you that the old uniform is really the new one. We compartmentalize parts of our lives that allow to justify wearing the old uniform. Humans have been doing this ever since they got new uniforms and new orders. But God is there. You never have to wonder where God is. You cannot escape the fact that God is there.

Jesus in the Gospel of Mark puts it this way... Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." Mark 1:14-15

To repent to realize who we are, what uniform we are destined to wear and from whom do we take our orders. This is how present our God is. This is how deep God wants relationship with us and wants us to live Shalom. Because God see's us a new people, freed from destruction and loved into a new reality. Given a new uniform. Do you see

yourself as a new person? The apostle Paul talks about this new uniform:

²⁷ As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Gal 3:27 NRS)

¹⁰ and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. (Col 3:10 NRS)

¹¹ In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

¹² As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Col 3:11-14 NRS)

This is us... this is you, this is the new you in God's eyes. Come near God says. I am here.