

June 14 & 15, 2025

Shaped and Shattered | *Priesthood*

Leviticus 8:1-3, 6-9 | Exodus 19:2-6

Pastor Rory Philstrom

"A reading from Leviticus 8:1-3;6-9"

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Take Aaron and his sons with him, the vestments, the anointing oil, the bull for the purification offering, the two rams, and the basket of unleavened bread; and assemble the whole congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting." Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water. He put the tunic on him, fastened the sash around him, clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him. He then put the decorated band of the ephod around him, tying the ephod to him with it. He placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. And he set the turban on his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden ornament, the holy diadem, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

A reading from Exodus 19:2-6

Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the Israelites: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."

I come bearing Good News, people of Prince of Peace! The priesthood is fully staffed!

It is a joy to be part of this newly full pastoral team. It really feels like we are birthing a new chapter of life here at Prince of Peace. It's been fun getting to know and work with Pastor Paul, Pastor Sarah, Pastor Jill, and Pastor Dan. We're figuring out our roles and I'm figuring out mine in this brand-new position: Associate Pastor of Engagement.

This is a role that hasn't existed before. We're swimming in new waters. My focus is to help Prince of Peace become a Christian resource and center for spiritual engagement for people in the first half of their adult lives. I'm talking to Gen Z, millennials—folks seeking authentic, radically hospitable Christian ministry that's deep, healing, joyful, and hopeful in the face of the world's worst challenges.

This is a good team of pastors. But when I say the priesthood is fully staffed, I'm not talking about us pastors.

A full team of pastors is good, but it's not news anymore. We're two weeks in and this world moves fast. I have Good News today – the priesthood is fully staffed.

Our main reading this weekend is from the book of Leviticus, and it recounts the ordination of Aaron. It's a beautiful scene: Moses brings Aaron and his sons before the whole congregation of Israel to ordain them as priests. Aaron is dressed in fine linens and ritual garments, created by all the skilled hands of the people whom God has endowed with skill.

There is the ephod, which is this apron draped over the priest with precious onyx stones on his shoulders that are carved with the names of the 12 sons of Israel, names that are carved so that on his shoulders he can feel the weight of the people that rests on him. These are a difficult and sometimes rebellious people, and the priest carries the weight of their anguish on his shoulders, for he is called to minister before God for their sake.

On his chest he wears a breastplate of gold filigree set with precious gemstones: twelve in all, each one carved with the name of a tribe of Israel. These names rest close to the priest's heart, living and dead, ancestor and neighbor, on whose behalf they go to seek atonement and reconciliation, to collapse the distance between the heart of God and the heart of the people.

The priest is further adorned with beautiful robes, bells hanging around the fringes of the legs, beautifully dyed cloth, fine needlework and

weaving, and on his head a rosette of pure gold bearing words carved into the ornament on his forehead. It reads “Holy to the Lord”.

It’s a rich and symbolic ordination.

But here’s the thing: Aaron’s ordination is 3,500 years old. It’s a great story, but it’s not news anymore. I have Good News today: the priesthood is fully staffed!

I even have a staff photo. So do you. Look into any mirror and you will see it.

You, all of you who are baptized, are the priesthood. You’ve been ordained with water and the Word, an ordination more fine and glorious than any gold filigree or precious gemstone or fancy dyed cloth could ever be.

As Saint Peter says in his first letter, you are a chosen people and a royal priesthood. You’ve been called to stand in the breaches of this world, to help bring wholeness, reconciliation, healing, shalom, peace.

You are how God is bringing the world back together.

Maybe you’re thinking, “I didn’t ask for this. I’m not cut out for it. I’m too busy. I don’t even know what being a priest means.”

I know! It is a cosmically big task, of that there is no doubt. But as people who desire to follow Jesus, you have been called to it, of that there is also no doubt.

But know also that you are not the first ones to be called to this task, you are not the only ones to be called to this task, and you will not be the last ones called to this task.

You are not the first ones.

You stand in a long line called and empowered by Jesus since the foundations of the world. The line stretches back through the saints to the disciples, back to the whole congregation of Israel gathered before the mountain of God in the Exodus, where Moses proclaimed the Word of God, “You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.”

And you, just like those Israelites, are ordained to a royal priestly order that goes back even further, an order that goes back all the way back to Genesis, to the first priest named in the books of scripture, the one named Melchizedek who as a priest and king who came out in Genesis 14 with bread and wine to offer thanksgiving to God with Abraham.

You are a royal priesthood.

You are royalty. Crowned with holiness and power, anointed as the rulers of old, carriers of an invocation of the power and freedom of the Holy Spirit. Powerful and free and gifted with life. Martin Luther would tell you, you are a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. This is part of the package of being a Jesus follower – life and life abundant!

You are not the only ones.

God, in ever expanding circles of blessing began this promise and call to royal priesthood with one that grew to two that grew to a whole family that grew to a whole tribe that grew to a whole nation that now through Jesus has grown to encompass the entire world. The floodgates of royal blessing have been thrown open wide to gather up all of creation in their waters. This means that dignity and honor and sovereignty and respect are endowed upon all people, all ethnicities, all cultures, all genders, all classes, all family backgrounds, all ages. All of humanity carries the mark and image of God and in baptism we uncover that identity and clarify it so you cannot forget it or doubt it or lose it.

Martin Luther would remind you: though you are a free lord of all, you are also a servant of all. This is the definition of what it means to be a Christian. To hold these identities together, royalty and priesthood. To be princesses and princes, yes, but princesses and princes of peace, because no one can be well unless everyone is well.

This is the point. This is why we need everyone.

You have been called because your wellness, that wholeness that you seek so deeply in your own life

is wrapped up in the wholeness that you are able to minister and to provide for others.

Your peace is interwoven with the world's peace. Your shalom is incomplete without the shalom of your neighbor. And until the whole world experiences peace, there will be no peace. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are deeply and intricately connected.

You are not alone.

And there are more coming.

You will not be the last ones.

Jesus will continue to call princely priestly people of peace until the end of the age when the devil himself is sealed and chained with an unbreakable chain and the world and its people are deceived no more. It doesn't all rest on us, but we are called to do our part.

Still, priesthood can feel confusing. What does the work of priesthood look like?

It looks like middle schooler girls deciding they wanted to pool their allowance and babysitting money so they could buy lunch for me, their 20-something youth director. That's priestly service. It looks like my wife waking up earlier than me and making the coffee so that when I stumble downstairs groggily in the morning that there is something there because she knows that I'm going to be a little bit happier if I can have some coffee. That's priestly service.

It looks like when my kids ages 6 and 3, pick up their toys and help clean up after themselves. They're serving the family and doing their part. That's priestly service.

Priestly service is also about laughter, hospitality, showing up, listening well, making space, or even just sharing a game or a story.

It also looks like advocating for the poor on the streets or in the halls of government, or calling up our representatives. It looks like the way people in my former congregation signed up and showed up

to accompany a single Hispanic mom to the court hearings she was being faced with in her life. It looks like the way that people in this congregation sign up and show up to feed people and clothe people and care for people through dental care and eye care with over 200 volunteers every week through the Mission Outpost. That's all priestly service.

Priestly service is the way that people minister to one another, maybe with their voices as we heard last week at the Reconcile Concert, where we were called to reach out and be with our neighbors, to be with one another, to share our tables and build a longer table.

Let me tell you a story.

During seminary, my best friend Shad and I biked around the North Island of New Zealand for a month. On Christmas Day we found ourselves in the middle of summer, in a desolate, dry stretch of the island. The land was sunburnt and it was over 100 degrees.

It was then that a bubble that had been forming in my front tire exploded, ruining not only my tube, but blowing a gash in the tire as well. I had no spare. There was no traffic on the road, but all we could do was hitchhike. Finally a Maori family stopped, and even though there was no room for me in their car they told us they would help. They stopped at the house about a mile down the road, and before I knew it there were kids on bikes and two more cars full of Maori people telling us to come, that they would take care of everything.

We were immediately introduced to every member of the Wesch family: aunts, uncles, cousins, everybody. One of the uncles immediately set about trying to find me a replacement tire. He measured my wheel and was off. A mom or an aunt made sure we had shade, cold water, and juice to drink. Then when she found out we hadn't had a proper lunch, she spread a huge Christmas feast before us. There was a roast ham, fresh fruit, potatoes, a mix of seafood, salads, cream buns, fresh bread, and shepherd's pie. It was so delicious.

The uncle got back with a rusty old 24" tire he had found who knows where in the field across from the house. He suggested it would "be just like a hot rod". I was dubious at first, but the wheel spun and held air, so we swapped out my 26" tire for the rusty 24" one. They fed us, gave us rest, fixed my bike, and even drove us up the next mountain.

That was priestly ministry. They didn't know us, but they ministered to us. They shared their love, their table, their peace.

You can do that too.

We do not serve from a place of our own holiness or a place of our own strength, but rather from the place of our mutual vulnerability and our mutual call to care. We minister to one another out of a shared hunger for a life of purpose, love, and joy.

We complete one another. My mind, body, spiritual wholeness is incomplete without you. No one can be well until everyone is well.

I need your ministry. I need your love.

The church needs your ministry. The neighborhood needs your love.

The world needs our ministry. The world needs our love.

Your family needs your service as a priest, your love and care.

Your friends need your love and care.

Your coworkers need your servanthood, your love and your care.

The outcast, the marginalized, the poor, the forgotten, the disenfranchised, they need your priesthood, because we carry one another on our bodies, in our own wholeness. You are there.

When Aaron was clothed with the robes of the priesthood, he wore reminders of his people on his shoulders, on his head, on his heart.

Touch your head right now with me, if you will.

Know you are crowned. You are crowned with the precious gems of divine royalty. You are perfectly free on behalf of Christ. You do not have to treat people the way that you have been treated. You can embrace the world the way God has embraced you.

You are lords because you are the Lords. You are holy to the Lord. Walk in the freedom and power of your name!

Touch your chest now with one hand and place the other on your shoulder.

Find the place where your heart is. Find the center of your soul. Feel your strength, which comes not from the broadness of your shoulders, but from the brokenness of your heart.

Your true strength comes from the way that your heart has been broken open to care for others and the ways that others hearts have been broken open to care for you. Imagine the gems of others love sitting on your breast, gifted to you in their priestly service of love to you so that you might offer your priestly service to another.

Bless others. Serve. Love. Minister.

The priesthood is fully staffed.