

Sermon on Numbers 16:41-18:7 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Numbers 16:41-18:7

Renewal is anchored in Atonement.

I have been reading “Facing the Mountain” by Daniel James Brown. It is a history of Japanese American patriots during World War II. Gives accounts of some of the worst of humanity. Stories of parents in internment camps and sons signing up to serve in the military.

Follows the labors of the 442nd. A battalion of American-born boys of Japanese heritage. Fighting in Italy and France.

One of the characters, Rudy Tokiwa, has been a hero to me in the story so far. Raised in Spokane by parents that ran the local laundry - before the war they were beloved members of the community. During, made to lose just about everything. Rudy though signs up to fight and becomes a scout, a relay of messages and intel on the battlefield.

His commanding officer will give him the name “punch drunk” because through exhaustion and injury he would just keep going. Beyond the lines, into the midst of the enemy to gather information, assist his friends, and get the work done.

If he refused to go into the thick of it, his men would be devastated.

I don't even know yet what happens to Rudy, but he is the scrappy hero of the story so far for me.

There is something about those that rush in - that don't leave me behind, that go where others fear, that get low to embrace the least, the invisible. They are heroes - willingly sacrificing for others.

We revere them, because our hearts are made to notice them...

In our text today, a few interludes all connected to a priest appointed by God to go into the midst of trouble, to rescue a people.

A model to shape the vision of the people, a precursor to another priest, an example for us.

Flowing from Korah's rebellion. Challenging the prophetic leadership of Israel. Challenging the anointed priesthood of Israel.

God gives a final word on the matter. Aaron, Jesus, Us.

Aaron

The precursor priest.

Following the judgment on Korah and his false priests who were burnt up when trying to offer incense before the Lord, the people grumble against Moses and Aaron again. "You have killed the people of the Lord." Then they march on the tent of meeting and the presence of God is there.

Like before he is ready to wipe them out for their disobedience and disrespect.

Numbers 16:44–45 "and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, [45] "Get away from the midst of this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces." (ESV)

"The midst of the congregation."

The wrath of God goes out then - deserved - and a plague begins.

Moses tells Aaron to take fire from the altar and incense to make atonement for the people.

You see, Aaron has been set aside by God to be the one, along with his sons, that makes offerings before the Lord.

Exodus 28:1 "Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar." (ESV)

It is confirmed in the order of the camp, in the instructions for worship, and in Korah's rebellion.

Aaron is the one anointed to make atonement.

Atonement: "reparation for a wrong or injury." Reconciliation. Here it must be between God and his people, there is a need for a bridge to repair or cover their sin.

With his censer, which made it through the previous rebellion, Aaron burns incense and it is a satisfying fragrance to Yahweh, making atonement for the people.

Meeting or extinguishing wrath against sin, saving, covering the people who lost in their sin lash out at God's anointed.

While it is a brief interlude here, atonement is central to the purpose of the priest.

Numbers 16:47 "So Aaron took it as Moses said and ran into the midst of the assembly. And behold, the plague had already begun among the people. And he put on the incense and made atonement for the people." (ESV)

"Ran into the midst of the assembly." He stood between the dead and the living and the plague was stopped.

The priest is the only one in this moment that can make atonement.

The priest is Aaron.

To prove it, God has Moses collect staffs with names on them from each tribe (13), to set before the ark (the testimony).

Numbers 17:5 "And the staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout. Thus I will make to cease from me the grumblings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against you." (ESV)

Aaron's buds, produces fruit, gives life! Blossoms, ripe almonds. Kept as another sign for the people.

“Where else in Scripture do you find a miniature tree with almond flowers and buds? That is exactly what the lampstand in the tabernacle was (Exodus 25:31-40). It was a stylized tree with symbols of fruitfulness on it. This tree with buds, blossoms, and flowers all at the same time was a static picture of the whole cycle of life under God’s blessing, nothing less than an image of the tree of life.”

Congregation however has this in-born ache to be in God’s presence, but they can’t because of their sin and it leaves them unsettled.

Numbers 17:12–13 “And the people of Israel said to Moses, “Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone. [13] Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, shall die. Are we all to perish?” (ESV)

An appropriate fear or reverence before God, but missing the gift that the priest is to them.

“God’s purpose for his people was resolutely good: his goal for their lives was not death but life. They needed to wake up and smell the sweet scent of almond blossoms: in spite of their rebellion, the Lord was watching over them for blessing.” ID

God speaks to Aaron and makes clear the priesthood is a gift.

Numbers 18:1 “So the LORD said to Aaron, “You and your sons and your father’s house with you shall bear iniquity connected with the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear iniquity connected with your priesthood.” (ESV)

Bearing the iniquity, making the sacrifice necessary for the people to remain in relationship with Yahweh.

Levites to guard the priests and the tent, to protect the people. The priests and the Levites were thus assigned a substitutionary ministry, bearing the danger of death for sin on behalf of the people.

Life is found through the work of the priest. Aaron going into the midst saves. This encounter is meant to settle it. It is building a framework for the people to

see. That they would long for another priest. And because they experience atonement while they wait, they become a people that follows God into the midst...

Jeremiah 29:5–7 “Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. [6] Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. [7] But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (ESV)

Atonement to renewal...

“Aaron’s staff alone budded with blossoms and ripe almonds, while the others remained dry wood. This life out of death symbol served as God’s justification of Aaron as the designated mediator. Significantly, then, in the Pentateuch “messiah” refers exclusively to Aaron the high priest (cf. “anointed”; Lev. 4:3, 5, 16; 6:22)—he is the one anointed with oil, whose mediation allows God’s people to draw near in worship. Drawing near to God through Aaron would lead to life. Doing so apart from this messiah would lead to death (Num. 17:12).

“With the coming of Jesus Christ, the symbolic worship of the tabernacle has given way to the reality: we draw near to God through the torn flesh and shed blood of the Messiah (Heb. 10:19–25). Christ’s life-out-of-death resurrection is God’s justification of his mediatorial work (Acts 17:31). Indeed, having such a High Priest—one who sacrificed himself to endure the wrath of God for our sins—we are compelled to draw near to God through him alone, worshiping our triune God with assurance, joy, reverence, and awe.”

Jesus

Every story in Scripture is telling a bigger story. None stand alone.

Aaron is pointing forward to the hope of a permanent priest. All of his sons, descendants doing the priestly ministry were holding the place for another.

Hebrews 7:22–28 “This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

[23] The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, [24] but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. [25] Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

[26] For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. [27] He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. [28] For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.” (ESV)

Jesus, God taken on flesh, goes into the midst of humanity and makes atonement by his own blood.

John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (ESV)

Moved into the neighborhood... He is the propitiation for our sin, he meets fully and finally the wrath we deserve. He makes atonement, bridging the gap, covering the sin, reconciling the relationship with the Father, with God.

He upends the expectations of the religious elite. He goes to the least.

Matthew 9:11–12 “And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” [12] But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” (ESV)

He proclaims the good news of the Kingdom, that because of his life, death, and resurrection, something new is unfolding. Something beautiful and anticipated since the garden has come.

It is why we have hope, why we can face our lives, experience. He came to us.

“The reality that we have been given to ponder is our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, standing in the heavenly Holy of Holies, interceding for you and me day by day. In the death of Christ, God assures us of his settled purpose for our blessing. In the resurrection of Christ, he assures us that the almond is already in bloom: our final salvation is near.”

He rescues us. Renews us. That others would see. We become staffs with his name on them meant to bear fruit...

John 15:3–5 “Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. [4] Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. [5] I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (ESV)

The fruit is renewal... of others and all things. It matches his heart.

Matthew 9:36–38 “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. [37] Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; [38] therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (ESV)

Us

We are the vine bearing fruit in his Kingdom.

1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (ESV)

Jesus is reconciling all things to himself. And he uses his people to do so. We are his hands and feet.

Made willing to go into the midst of the least, those in need of rescue because Jesus has made atonement for us. His atonement is our anchor and leverage for renewal.

“There is a challenge here for all of us. Under the new covenant, we have all been given the task of being ambassadors for Christ, bringing the aroma of the gospel to those around us (2 Corinthians 2:14-16). We have all been commissioned to intercede on behalf of our friends and neighbors and to set before them the line between life and death.” ID

Vocationally: Each gifted, called, and equipped for wherever the Lord has placed us. Not just what we typically think of as ministry, but bringing his renewal to bear in our work.

“Our daily work can be a calling only if it is reconceived as God’s assignment to serve others.” “We are continuing God’s work of forming, filling, and subduing. Whenever we bring order out of chaos, whenever we draw out creative potential, whenever we elaborate and “unfold” creation beyond where it was when we found it, we are following God’s pattern of creative cultural development.”

“If God’s purpose for your job is that you serve the human community, then the way to serve God best is to do the job as well as it can be done.” Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*

Neighborly: Extending his love and care to everyone. Not asking “who is my neighbor?,” but seeing every image-bearer as one. Befriending, and together beholding Jesus.

Differently: When the ‘Jones’ do something else, we shock them with who has a place at our table. How we live, where we live, how we invest, is all different in light of who Christ is and who he has called us to be. Different from cultural expectations, familial expectations, and our own expectations.

How the story is told. What we do when we are awakened to the atoning work of Jesus for us.

Vision for Reservoir: To be a church for the unseen in our community, multiplying disciples anchored in the word proclaiming the gospel for all of life for the glory of Christ.

It's what we mean when we say we are “rescued by Jesus, Reshaped into Family, for the Renewal of others and all things.”

Going into the midst, announcing the atonement Jesus has won for all who believe.

Bringing Shalom, with our hands, with our voices, with our family, because we have experienced peace in Jesus.

Rush in, not to be heroes but because the hero has called us to it.

Renewal is anchored in Atonement.

Make him your priest and King - Believe that Jesus lived, died, and rose for you. To make atonement for your sin, to give you a blossoming life in him. Live no under his rule according to his word.

“There is now no exclusion for all of us who are in Christ Jesus: precisely because we are in him, we have the right to go where he goes and to stand in God’s presence as he does. Now even when I have sinned, I can run to God without fear of judgment and confess my sin, asking for his cleansing.” And we can bring others in with us.

Move into the midst - Commit your labors, leisure and lives to the glory of Jesus and good of your neighbors. Period. No caveats.

You know what it might look like. Tell some friends to keep you accountable and move into the midst with you.

Renewal is anchored in Atonement.

We run into the midst of the people not to win the war, but because the war has already been won.

Shall we go?