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April 7th: Leviticus 17 & Mark 5:21-43

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Slaughter and meat-eating regulations. The woman with the discharge of blood and Jairus' daughter.

Some passages referenced:

Genesis 9:3-6 (the law concerning blood); Genesis 9:6, Numbers 35:33 (similarity between description of shedding blood of an animal and shedding the blood of a human being); Isaiah 13:21, 34:14 (goats and demons in the wilderness); Leviticus 11 (food laws); Deuteronomy 12:15-28 (laws for slaughter and meat-eating in the land).

Numbers 32:41, Deuteronomy 3:14, Judges 10:3-4 (Old Testament Jairs); Mark 6:56, Acts 5:15, 19:12 (healing through touch of garments and other things associated with a healer's body); Mark 7:34 (words preserved in Aramaic).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Leviticus 17. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the people of Israel, and say to them, This is the thing that the Lord has commanded. If

any one of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to offer it as a gift to the Lord in front of the tabernacle of the Lord, blood guilt shall be imputed to that man.

He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people. This is to the end that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they sacrifice in the open field, that they may bring them to the Lord, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the Lord. And the priest shall throw the blood on the altar of the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and burn the fat for a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom they whore. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations. And you shall say to them, Any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among them, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to offer it to the Lord, that man shall be cut off from his people.

If any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among them, eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement for the life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.

Any one also of the people of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among them, who takes in hunting any beast or bird that may be eaten, shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. For the life of every creature is its blood, its blood is its life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood, whoever eats it shall be cut off.

And every person who eats what dies of itself, or what is torn by beasts, whether he is a native or a sojourner, shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening. Then he shall be clean. But if he does not wash them, or bathe his flesh, he shall bear his iniquity.

Leviticus 17-27 have commonly been known as the Holiness Code. It is seen to involve a movement out from the focus upon ritual of the first half of the book into a much more expansive ethical and moral concern with holiness. However, this understanding establishes a false breach between the concerns of the first half of the book and those of the latter half.

Rather, a proper approach to ritual should inculcate a sensitivity to moral and ethical concerns. Ethics and ritual are mutually constitutive. A proper practice of ritual is

confirmed in ethical practice, and true ethical concerns will come with an increased sensitivity to the importance of the ritual.

While the first half of the book then focused upon the priests and centred upon the service of the tabernacle, chapter 17 addresses the broader people of Israel. Chapter 17 contains five different commands, each introduced with something like the expression, if anyone of the house of Israel. The first one in verses 3-7, the second in verses 8-9, third in verses 10-12, fourth in verses 13-14 and then the fifth and final one in verses 15-16.

These commands come with warnings upon disobedience, and most include a rationale for obedience. The central command concerns the eating of blood, which should remind us of Genesis 9-3-6, which is in the background of the commandments here. Genesis 9-3-6 The first command of chapter 17 is that all slaughtered oxen, lambs or goats must be offered as sacrifices to the Lord.

Shedding the blood of an animal is spoken of in a way similar to the shedding of the blood of a human being, as we see in Genesis 9-6 and Numbers 35-33. You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. The person who breaks this command will be cut off from among his people.

This may be a reference to being exiled or possibly not being acknowledged by God, possibly not having offspring, there are a number of other theories. The purpose of this command is that slaughtered oxen, lambs and goats should be sacrificed to the Lord as peace offerings. The peace offering, certain parts of it were offered to the Lord, but the worshipper could eat most of it, and the blood would also be used in a blood rite.

However, the teaching here is expanded to make clear that it is also designed to stop the alternative pagan practice that some of the Israelites were presumably engaging in, of sacrificing to goat demons in the wilderness. The association of goats with demons in the wilderness may help us better to understand the significance of Azazel in the Law of the Day of Coverings in the previous chapter. The wilderness is associated with demons, goat demons, we see this elsewhere in scripture.

A number of commentators point to Isaiah 13-21 and 34-14 in this connection. The wilderness then is a realm of demons and wild animals, and the goat sent out into the wilderness is expelled from the realm of the Lord's presence into the realm of the demons and into the realm of the wild beasts. The purpose of this law in chapter 17 then seems to be designed in part to guard against a particular form of idolatry.

It also extends the logic of the sacrificial system out into the more general life of the people in the camp. The second commandment in this chapter extends the principle of the first, including the sojourner. All sacrifices and ascension offerings must be offered to the Lord.

The Lord has a complete monopoly on sacrifice. And the central commandment of this chapter is the prohibition on consuming blood. Once again, this is founded upon Genesis chapter 9. The blood taboo highlights God's ownership of all life, and also the analogy between human life and animal life.

You can't eat the animal's blood. The soul is in its blood. There's a continuity between the life of animals and the life of human beings, and life belongs to God.

It's not for us to dispose of in whatever way we wish. The laws of Leviticus 11 list clean and unclean animals. There were also sacrificial and non-sacrificial animals.

The key sacrificial animals were the ox, the goat, and the lamb. And then there were secondary sacrificial animals in the two birds that could be offered. The turtle dove and the pigeon.

Each of the ox, the goat, and the lamb had to be offered as peace offerings if they were to be eaten. However, the fourth commandment of the chapter teaches that clean but non-sacrificial animals had to have their blood poured out and covered up with earth. Partly because that would prevent the blood being used for any wrong purpose.

The rationale for this, again, is that the life of the animal is in the blood. Now, we can risk taking this statement in an overly literal way. Worrying that scripture is teaching that the life of the animal is literally contained in the blood in some way that might be proven or disproven with modern science.

However, our science paints far too narrow a picture of the world to understand such a commandment. Life is bound up with the blood in much the same way as the person is seen in their face. It's not a literal scientific connection, it's just a very natural way of seeing the world.

Finally, the person eating an animal that died by itself, or that was torn apart by the wind, or that was eaten by animals, it wasn't clear whether such an eater had been polluted by eating blood or not, so they had to be treated as unclean and cleanse themselves. There are later laws given in Deuteronomy chapter 12, which need to be read alongside this chapter for an understanding of concessions that were made for settled life in the land. Deuteronomy chapter 12, verses 15 following.

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Deuteronomy chapter 12, verses 15 following. And in many places down to the modern day, it's a time when man is reminded of the reality of the mortality of flesh, and the mysterious commonality of all creaturely life. It reminds us of human power over the animal world, the power that man has to act almost as a god over the animal world, a great power.

And it reminds us also of the source of all life, both of animal life and of human life. God didn't forbid meat-eating, but permitted it, particularly after the flood. However, meat-eating is a matter of considerable gravity.

The entire sacrificial system both permitted and prescribed the killing and the eating of animals. However, the logic of the sacrificial system depended upon a recognition of both the analogy between animal life and human life, because if there were no analogy, there'd be no way that an animal could substitute for a human being, but it also depended on the logic of the sacrificial system. God also highlighted the key difference between animals and human beings.

Human beings alone were made in the image of God, so although animals and their blood can symbolically substitute for mankind, their blood cannot truly deal with sin. And teaching people to take the killing and the eating of animals very seriously is one of the ways that the logic of the sacrificial system more generally is underlined. Taking life is a matter of extreme seriousness, whether it's a human being or whether it's an animal.

And because of the gravity of taking life, when an Israelite puts his hand upon an animal and that animal is killed and taken up into God's presence in the Ascension offering, for instance, that worshipper should recognise the weightiness of what is just taking place. A question to consider. How might a clearer understanding of Leviticus' teaching on the slaughtering and eating of meat inform our own eating practices and our treatment of animals? Mark chapter 5 verses 21 to 43 And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years and who had suffered much under many physicians and had spent all that she had and was no better but rather grew worse.

She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, And immediately the flow of blood dried up and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, And his disciples said to him, And he looked around to see who had done it.

But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. And he said to her, While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further? But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John, the brother of James.

They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly, and Jesus said to them, And when he had entered, he said to them, The child is not dead, but sleeping. And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was.

Taking her by the hand, he said to her, Which means, Little girl, I say to you, arise. And immediately the girl got up and began walking, for she was twelve years of age, and they were immediately overcome with amazement. And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

The end of Mark 5 relates two entangled events of healing. Both of the people being healed are women, and both of them are connected with twelve years. The woman with the discharge of blood had suffered from it for twelve years, and the daughter of Jairus was twelve years of age.

The passage begins with Jesus crossing back to the other side of the Sea of Galilee after the events in the lands of the Gerasenes. Jairus was one of the rulers of the synagogue who would have led services. That Jairus was the ruler of a synagogue also illumines the fact that opposition to Jesus among the religious leaders of Israel was far from total.

There were some among them who did look to Jesus as a great teacher and one who was speaking the truth. Jairus' name is given to us, unlike the name of most people for whom Christ performed miracles or exorcisms. Perhaps he was a figure who was known in the early church, or perhaps his name itself is important.

Joel Marcus suggests that it might have been the Greek transliteration of names meaning either he enlightens or he awakens. Either of those would be significant in the context. We also see a number of people in the Old Testament that might be a background here.

A man called Jair the Manassite captured some of the area of Gilead in Numbers 32, verse 41 and Deuteronomy 3, verse 14. Another Jair was one of the judges in Judges 10, verses 3-4. He operated in the same region and Jairus seems to be in that same sort of region too.

Jesus is requested to lay his hands on Jairus' daughter and heal her and he goes with Jairus to his house. But on the way he's thronged by the crowd and there's a woman with a discharge of blood, presumably vaginal. It seems to be a chronic hemorrhaging of blood rather than just abnormally severe menstruation.

The effect of this would be to render her permanently unclean. It's probably one of the reasons why she approaches Jesus in the way that she did. Had she been more open in her approach she would probably not have been able to approach him at all.

Many doctors had tried to help her but had just increased her suffering and also consumed all her resources. So Jesus' healing contrasts with the failure of all the experts. She had heard about Jesus and perhaps we should consider the fact that she was probably confined to the margins of society by her condition.

She was in many respects someone from an utterly different station in life from Jairus. She believes that if she were just to touch Jesus' garments she would be healed. We see

similar beliefs in chapter 6, verse 56 and then also in Acts 5, verse 15 where people wanted to be beneath the shadow of Peter as he walked by and in Acts 19, verse 12 where people would take handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched the skin of Paul and bring them to the sick so that they might be healed by them.

The touch of the woman in this position would have been defiling but not as defiling as touching someone's flesh. A defiled person had to wash themselves and wash their clothes so it was both themselves, their body and their clothes that were defiled by the touch. But here there is a life that overcomes impurity and that is transmitted to the woman rather than the woman transmitting her impurity to Christ.

This passage is also an illustration of the way in which clothes can function as an extension of a person, a way in which the clothes carry something of the significance and the power of the person. Jesus inquires who touched him to his disciples' amazement because there's a crowd around but Jesus recognises what has happened. In calling for the woman who had touched him to make herself known, the stage is set for an act of recognition, blessing and inclusion that completes the healing.

She will no longer be an isolated and marginalised individual hiding herself in the crowd but she will be one who is seen and addressed as daughter by her saviour. When the woman reveals herself she comes in fear and trembling and falls down before him. This is a response reminiscent of the way that people respond to appearances of God in scripture.

She tells him everything and Jesus blesses her, addresses her as daughter and tells her that her faith has made her well. Faith here is not intellectual belief in some concepts or doctrines. It's a confident and a daring trust to come near to Christ.

The prominence of faith in this story, as in that of Jairus and his daughter that follows, should be seen as related to the language of salvation that occurs in both. The salvation in these stories seems to refer to physical healing and raising of the dead in the case of Jairus' daughter. The language of faith could be interpreted narrowly too.

However, Jesus routinely connects physical and spiritual senses of these things. Faith is a practical confidence to look to Jesus for deliverance, not just in spiritual matters. And when it's exercised in physical matters it is seen to have a spiritual connotation and significance too.

Our tidy divisions between physical and spiritual can obstruct our understanding at such points. Faith looks to Christ in whatever situation it finds itself in, even if it's physical difficulty. As in the story of Jairus' daughter that follows this, early Christian readers of this story probably figured themselves into the position of the woman with the discharge of blood, recognising her experience as a model for Christian experience more generally.

We should do this too. Her being addressed as daughter at the end might also make the reader think of the new family that Jesus is forming around himself. However, all of this creates a delay and by the time that Jesus reaches the house of Jairus his daughter is dead.

The feared crisis has hit and there might seem to be nothing more to be done. Jesus calls Jairus, however, to keep his confidence in his sufficiency for the situation. There are many similarities to the story of Lazarus here, meeting the mourners, saying that the dead person is sleeping, delaying until the person is dead, etc.

Jesus performs this miracle with only Peter, James and John of his disciples present. They are privileged witnesses to his power. And saying that the daughter was sleeping would make people think of the final resurrection, where those sleeping in their graves would be awakened.

This is the language that we find in Scripture and elsewhere, the dead sleeping and being awakened at the resurrection. However, the final resurrection was a long distant hope for the end of all things. It wasn't something that could really address the immediacy of the grief that people felt, or at least so they thought.

However, Jesus can refer to death this way because in him the resurrection and the life had entered into Jairus' house. Jesus takes the girl by the hand and addresses her, telling her to arise. The use of Aramaic here, the fact that the original statement is preserved in its original language, gives the reader some sense of the immediacy of this powerful speech act.

These were not regular words, but words with a mysterious might, and they seem to be preserved for us in their original form for this reason. We see a similar thing in Mark chapter 7 verse 34, where the words spoken to the man whose eyes were opened is also retained for us. The reference to arising naturally, and I think appropriately, makes us think of the resurrection and maybe giving her something to eat is also in part to make us think of later proofs of Jesus' own resurrection given in taking food and not merely a reference to the girl's recovery of strength.

Jesus once again strictly instructs those present to keep the raising of the girl a secret, although his taking Peter, James and John with him makes clear that he wanted the event to be witnessed and later spoken of openly. However, to tell it at that point in time, before Jesus' own resurrection had disclosed his true power over death, would be premature. That had to wait until after his own resurrection had taken place.

A question to consider. The woman with the issue of blood suffered with that condition for 12 years, and the daughter of Jairus was 12 years old. Why does Mark record these details? What deeper significance to these healings might be suggested by them?