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April 1st: Exodus 39 & Mark 1:32-45

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Priestly garments and conclusion of the work. The Messianic secret.

Genesis 6:22, 7:5, 16 (Noah doing everything according to God's instruction); Numbers 4:4-15 (the specified colours of the coverings for transportation of the tabernacle furniture); Numbers 15:37-41 (the tassels of the Israelites' garments); Song of Solomon 4:15 (the woman and the garden spring); Genesis 1:31—2:3 (God's conclusion of his creation work).

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

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Transcript

Exodus 39 From the blue and purple and scarlet yarns they made finely woven garments, for ministering in the holy place. They made the holy garments for Aaron, as the Lord had commanded Moses. He made the effort of gold, blue, and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine-twined linen.

And they hammered out gold leaf, and he cut it into threads to work into the blue and purple and the scarlet yarns and into the fine-twined linen. In skilled design, they made for the effort attaching shoulder pieces, joined to it at its two edges. And the skillfully

woven band on it was of one piece with it, and made like it, of gold, blue, and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine-twined linen, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

They made the onyx stones, enclosed in settings of gold filigree, and engraved like the engravings of a signet, according to the names of the sons of Israel. And he set them on the shoulder pieces of the effort, to be stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel, as the Lord had commanded Moses. He made the breast-piece, in skilled work, in the style of the effort, of gold, blue, and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine-twined linen.

It was square. They made the breast-piece doubled, a span its length, and a span its breadth, when doubled. And they set in it four rows of stones.

A row of sardius, topaz, and carbuncle was the first row, and the second row an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond, and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst, and the fourth row a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They were enclosed in settings of gold filigree. There were twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel.

They were like signets, each engraved with its name for the twelve tribes. And they made on the breast-piece twisted chains like cords, of pure gold. And they made two settings of gold filigree and two gold rings, and put the two rings on the two edges of the breast-piece.

And they put the two cords of gold in the two rings at the edges of the breast-piece. They attached the two ends of the two cords to the two settings of filigree. Thus they attached it in front to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod.

Then they made two rings of gold, and put them at the two ends of the breast-piece, on its inside edge next to the ephod. And they made two rings of gold, and attached them in front to the lower part of the two shoulder-pieces of the ephod, at its seam above the skillfully woven band of the ephod. And they bound the breast-piece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a lace of blue, so that it should lie on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, and that the breast-piece should not come loose from the ephod, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

He also made the robe of the ephod woven all of blue, and the opening of the robe in it was like the opening in a garment, with a binding around the opening so that it might not tear. On the hem of the robe they made pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. They also made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates all around the hem of the robe, between the pomegranates a bell, and a pomegranate a bell, and a pomegranate around the hem of the robe for ministering, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

They also made the coats, woven of fine linen for Aaron and his sons, and the turban of

fine linen, and the caps of fine linen, and the linen undergarments of fine twined linen, and the sash of fine twined linen, and of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, embroidered with needlework, as the Lord had commanded Moses. They made the plate of the holy crown of pure gold, and wrote on it an inscription, like the engraving of a signet, Holy to the Lord. And they tied to it a cord of blue to fasten it on the turban above, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished, and the people of Israel did according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses. So they did. Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its utensils, its hooks, its frames, its bars, its pillars and its bases, the covering of tanned ram skins and goat skins, and the veil of the screen, the ark of the testimony with its poles and the mercy seat, the table with all its utensils, and the bread of the presence, the lampstand of pure gold, and its lamps with the lamps set, and all its utensils, and the oil for the light, the golden altar, the anointing oil, and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the entrance of the tent, the bronze altar and its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin and its stand, the hangings of the court, its pillars and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court, its cords and its pegs, and all the utensils for the service of the tabernacle, for the tent of meeting, the finely worked garments for ministering in the holy place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons for their service as priests.

According to all that the Lord had commanded Moses, so the people of Israel had done all the work. And Moses saw all the work, and behold they had done it as the Lord had commanded, so had they done it. Then Moses blessed them.

In Exodus chapter 39 there's a repeated emphasis upon everything being done according to Moses' command. There is a thorough observance of everything that God has instructed and we find a similar expression used of Noah in Genesis chapter 6 verse 22, 7 verse 5, and 7 verse 16. Noah obeys God's commandments concerning the ark in great detail and Moses and the people observe God's instructions concerning the tabernacle in great detail.

And we've already seen some of the associations between these two things. The ark and the tabernacle are performing similar purposes. The tabernacle is a new sort of ark.

It's a place for God's presence in a world of chaos. The construction of the tabernacle could also be sharply contrasted with the construction of the golden calf which was much more haphazard. Here we have great attention given to the detail and to constructing things according to a pattern that has been given by the Lord.

In the case of the golden calf no such care was taken. We haven't commented upon the different colours of the yarn to this point. They're clearly important as we see in Numbers chapter 4 verses 4 to 15.

This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tent of meeting, the most holy things. When the camp is to set out Aaron and his son shall go in and take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it. Then they shall put on it a covering of goat skin and spread on top of that a cloth all of blue and shall put in its poles and over the table of the bread of the presence they shall spread a cloth of blue and put on it the plates the dishes for incense the bowls and the flagons for the drink offering the regular show bread shall also be on it.

Then they shall spread over them a cloth of scarlet and cover the same with a covering of goat skin and shall put in its poles and they shall take a cloth of blue and cover the lampstand for the light with its lamps its tongues its trays and the vessels for oil with which it is supplied and they shall put it with all its utensils in a covering of goat skin and put it on the carrying frame and over the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue and cover it with a covering of goat skin and shall put in its poles and they shall take all the vessels of the service that are used in the sanctuary and put them in a cloth of blue and cover them with a covering of goat skin and put them on the carrying frame and they shall take away the ashes from the altar and spread a purple cloth over it and they shall put on it all the utensils of the altar which are used for the service there the fire pans the forks the shovels and the basins all the utensils of the altar and they shall spread on it a covering of goat skin and shall put in its poles and when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary as the camp sets out after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry these but they must not touch the holy things lest they die these are the things of the tent of meeting that the sons of Kohath are to carry the high priest garments contain materials used in the inner layer of the tabernacle and also associated with the veils and entranceways but their clothing is not just associated with the tabernacle it also has associations with some clothing that regular israelites would wear in numbers chapter 15 verse 37 to 41 we read the lord said to moses speak to the people of israel and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and put cord blue on the tassel of each corner and it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the lord to do them not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes which you are inclined to whore after so you shall remember and do all my commandments and be holy to your god i am the lord your god who brought you out of the land of egypt to be your god i am the lord your god the tassels on israelites clothing would seem to connect their clothing with the clothing of the high priest reminding them of their priestly status or at least their belonging to a nation a kingdom of priests the high priest isn't just someone who acts on behalf of regular israelites in some sense he also symbolizes israel as a whole and all israelites participate to some degree in his status while we have light that is associated with the eyes in the tabernacle with the lamp stand and we have food associated with the mouth in the table of the showbread and we have incense associated with the nose in the altar of incense we don't really have sound and it's something that happens later with the introduction of music through

David in particular and his introduction of musicians to the worship of the tabernacle and the temple later on the one set of sounds that we do have are the bells on the clothing of the high priest bells that bring a sound in with him as he comes into the presence of the Lord perhaps we should see this as some sort of precursor for the music with which we'll enter into God's presence in the future the high priest has garments that connect him with the tabernacle on his forehead he has a turban which has a gold plate or blossom on it saying holy to the Lord and we can see that gold plate as being associated with the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat the whole of the tabernacle is a sort of body image just as the body of the high priest is dedicated in its various parts anointed with blood and with oil so different parts of the tabernacle are anointed in a similar way there's an association between the body and the building or the body and the tent the tabernacle is a garment-like building made of cloth and other fabrics and the clothing of the high priest is tent-like clothing there's an analogy between these two things and they help us to understand the way in which the high priest represents the tabernacle and the way that the tabernacle represents the body the tabernacle more generally can symbolize the righteous man if we reflect upon the different parts of the tabernacle we can see analogies with different parts of the body the most holy place which is the seat of God's presence which contains the ark of the covenant with the tablets of stone inside represents the heart and the mind of the human person God should dwell in that realm and his law should be meditated upon should be hidden within our hearts whereas if you go out to the holy place you have things that are associated with the senses you have the altar of incense and the incense is connected with smell Jesus taught that the lamp of the body is the eye and the lampstand represents sight and the eyes it gives illumination enables us to see but also symbolizes the eyes more generally the table of the presence is associated with the mouth and food that we take into ourselves the ear hears the tinkling of the bells of the high priest's garments the tabernacle structure itself is the skin or the body that's over us terms are used for the construction of the tabernacle which remind us of the body it has ribs and it has shoulders there are faces too the altar is the place where we offer up our life and our works through symbolic substitutes and the laver is the place of cleansing where we wash the bounded courtyard represents a well-ordered life in our public affairs the laver could also be connected with our procreative capacity which is why I think it's particularly associated with women and with the spring or the well and these other symbols that are associated with women in scripture such symbolism gets developed further on in scripture in such things as Solomon's temple or the poetry of the Song of Solomon or in the New Testament as that imagery is developed further in prophecy in places like Revelation or in the teaching that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit both individual and corporate in the temple of Solomon for instance there are two pillars set up at the entrance which very naturally connect with pillars of legs in the holy place you now have five tables on each side and five lamp stands on each side which very naturally connect with the fingers on each hand the water chariots associated with the bronze sea which suggests the movement of water out of the tabernacle into the world invites association with other imagery of

waters flowing out from the temple and giving life to the world imagery that's used of the bride in song of solomon chapter 4 verse 15 in verse 32 it's referred to as the tabernacle of the tent of meeting this terminology is usually separated it's usually called either the tabernacle or the tent of meeting but this highlights that it's both dwelling place and meeting place it's dual function it's place of god's dwelling and it's the place of communion with god and the people bring the tabernacle to mooses the way that this is described in a context that's so full of references to the original creation suggests to me that we may think back to genesis chapter 2 and the bringing of the woman to the man at the end of that chapter the woman that's formed out of his side built up in the same way as the tabernacle is built the construction of the tabernacle is done by the people under the leadership of bezelel and holiyab and through the gift of the holy spirit is the spirit and the bride creating this tent is a bridal tent and the bridegroom would come to dwell in it and be represented by the male priest within it but i think we are justified in seeing some gendered symbolism here they finish the work and mooses blesses them there's a new creation event here this time with man as the creator under god it ends in a manner reminiscent of genesis chapter 1 verse 31 to 2 verse 3 and god saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good and there was evening and there was morning the sixth day thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them and on the seventh day god finished his work that he had done and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done so god blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it god rested from all his work that he had done in creation a question to consider how might reading this passage against the backdrop of genesis chapter 1 and 2 help us to understand more fully what is taking place in the building of the tabernacle and how it drives forward god's original intent in the first creation mark chapter 1 verses 32 to 45 that evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons and the whole city was gathered together at the door and he healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons and he would not permit the demons to speak because they knew him and rising very early in the morning while it was still dark he departed and went out to a desolate place and there he prayed and simon and those who were with him searched for him and they found him and said to him everyone is looking for you he said to them let us go on to the next towns that i may preach there also for that is why i came out and he went throughout all galilee preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons and a leper came to him imploring him and kneeling said to him if you will you can make me clean move with pity he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him i will be clean and immediately the leprosy left him and he was made clean and jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once and said to him see that you say nothing to anyone but go show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what mooses commanded for a proof to them but he went out and began to talk freely about it and to spread the news so that jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in desolate places and people were coming to him from every quarter the end of mark 1 continues the sequence of healings and exorcisms begun on the sabbath morning in capernaum in

verse 21 after the exorcism of the in the synagogue there is the healing of simon's mother-in-law followed by more general healings of the sick and deliverance of those oppressed by demons after sundown the healings and the exorcisms at sundown occurred after the sabbath day had ended and although jesus heals many and casts out demons this doesn't seem to be the central purpose of his ministry and he doesn't seem to go out of his way looking for the sick and the demon possessed rather such healings and exorcisms testify to the central purpose of his ministry of proclaiming and teaching concerning the kingdom of god he is the talk of capernaum and all who are sick and in need from demon oppression are brought to him as an aside at this point demonic possession is not something that's discussed a lot in the old testament but it seems to be all over the place in the gospels and later on in the book of acts we should not presume that demonic oppression is a uniform phenomenon found everywhere to the same degree and in the same way rather it seems to vary from society to society and as the word of christ goes throughout a society it seems to be less prevalent or god can hold it at bay at other points it's something that is far more widespread within a society so we should not be surprised to find that at the beginning of jesus ministry there is great conflict with demonic oppression with satan in the wilderness this is a society that's oppressed by demonic forces in a particular way the description of jesus healing many is not to be taken as a suggestion that jesus lacked the power to heal all although perhaps there were too many there for him to heal them all on that occasion the main point though is that jesus heals a considerable number of persons also he casts out demons and heals people with various diseases jesus isn't selective in the sorts of ailments that he heals and as we proceed through the gospel we'll see there's a great number of different kinds of afflictions that are healed by him and jesus here forbids the demon to speak because they know who he is in verse 34 here we see what some have called the messianic secret the way in which jesus hid his identity during his public earthly ministry and revealed it only to a few it's an important feature of jesus ministry and mark's gospel in particular and many have commented upon it jesus often discourages people from talking about healings and deliverances and also silences demons when they're about to declare his identity there are occasions when jesus displays his work more openly but it seems for the most part he keeps it largely under wraps the purpose of the secrecy seems to involve rather more than simply a concern to avoid excessive attention from authorities and the crowds before the proper time although that may be part of it the disciples and the demons have a knowledge about jesus identity and mission for which the time has not yet come for more public disclosure there is an expiration date however upon the secrecy as we see in mark chapter 9 verse 9 where the disciples are told not to mention the transfiguration until christ has risen from the dead and part of the purpose of the secrecy seems to be the great openness to misunderstanding that the revelation of jesus identity prior to his death and resurrection would provoke his mission is not what people were expecting from the messiah and only in the light of his death and resurrection could its true character and its divergence from typical jewish expectation be made known the point then is not to avoid all revelation but premature revelation the

time will come when the true character of what god is doing in jesus of nazareth will be made clearly known and then what was whispered in secret could be declared from the rooftops verse 35 ends the 24 hour period that began in verse 21 jesus secretly leads to a deserted place to pray rather than developing a popular movement from capernaum outwards he goes from town to town to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom carrying out his mission on his own terms jesus mission does not move in predictable ways it doesn't follow the conventional rules it doesn't operate in terms of people's expectations or demands jesus doesn't give himself over to the crowd but often retreats from them and moves on he recognizes i think among other things the fickleness of the crowd they're limited and their mistaken understanding of the nature of his mission and the danger of them setting the terms of his mission jesus is led by the spirit he goes where the spirit wishes he doesn't move according to human plans or purposes or the desires of the crowd there's a real danger for instance of becoming a movement defined by a particular region or town rather than by god's proclamation of his kingdom in the fullness of time a kingdom that is not limited by locality by refusing to give himself to the people of any particular town jesus protects his ministry from such distortion his mission is to proclaim and to establish the gospel of god and this necessitates moving from place to place and one of the things that marks jesus ministry is his giving himself to all and resistance to having his ministry claimed and by any single group and its agenda simon and those who are with him sought jesus out at this point and the description of simon and the other disciples as simon and those who are with him highlights the prominence of simon peter among the disciples we should also consider the fact that mark is probably resting in large measure upon peter's own testimony which might heighten the existing prominence of peter among the disciples the problem of publicity is further highlighted in the story of the healing of the leper with which this chapter ends leprosy in scripture is not what we think of as leprosy which is the condition called hansen's disease rather it refers to a variety of different skin conditions lepers would generally live away from larger bodies of population so jesus probably met this man in a more secluded location he's moved by pity at the man's plight and he touches the man a means by which someone would usually contract impurity from the leper but by which jesus communicates wholeness such a healing doesn't merely deliver the leper from a physical ailment but also from social and physical isolation so that he can become a member of the wider people again and become part of the fellowship and the congregation and jesus sternly instructs him not to say anything and he drives him off rather he must present himself to the priest and go through the prescribed process of cleansing this suggests that jesus wants to observe the rules of the law also that the man is maybe a testimony of the judgment upon the people elsewhere we see the language of proof for them being used in the sense proof against them as evidence of judgment the sternness with which jesus instructs the man has a connotation a strong connotation of anger it isn't gentle and the same thing can be said of the driving off it's language that elsewhere we can see used of demons it's possible that the implied anger relates to the heel lepers foreseen future actions as contrary to jesus's instructions the leper spreads the news

making it very difficult for Jesus to carry out his mission openly in towns rather like John the Baptist he has to minister in the desolate places outside of areas of human habitation this is one of the dangers that the messianic secret is designed to guard against to have Jesus's mission co-opted by people who see the signs the healings the exorcisms and all these great acts and want Christ to serve them on their terms and want to create a movement around Christ that is defined not by his mission but by what they want from him something to consider try to imagine how people at this period in Jesus ministry would have interpreted his actions and the sorts of misunderstandings to which they would have been most exposed and vulnerable