I love worship. So I think this modified worship where everyone is worshipping from home is very hard for me. I can almost see you sitting out there in your regular pews and seats. The sanctuary may be empty of people; but it is filled with the Lord. This is the continuation of our series on the Old Testament Book of Leviticus and Pastor Scott and my attempt to transform it from a least favorite book of the Bible to a more favorite book of the Bible.

I love the moments as the people of God and also God Himself draw near to the Temple of God. “Draw nigh unto me, and I will draw nigh unto you.” Promises the Lord. I love the buzz and excitement. I love the quiet during the Prelude and the time to prepare my heart for what God will do. I love when the elder announces in the Assurance of Forgiveness, “In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!” I am each Sunday reminded of what Jesus has done for me and that it is finished and accomplished; I am completely forgiven in the blood of this Lamb. I love when I baptize a baby and I am carrying the child in my arms up the aisle at the end and I say, “See what great love God has for us, that we should be called children of God. And so we are.” (I John 3: 1) And I look in your faces and I see the great love you have for this little baby and I think to myself, “Yes, that’s the same way God looks at us in love as His children also.” I love being profoundly moved by some piece of music and how praise brings us into the presence of God. I love reading scripture and listening to it; sometimes the best sermon is the one God preaches to your heart directly from the Word of God, no preacher necessary. I love the intensity of the way you listen to a sermon; how quiet it gets; how no one moves an eyelash. I know in that moment that it is the Lord God Almighty speaking to you, not I. The WORD has come and is speaking. But you know, probably my favorite moment in the service is the benediction at the end. I always feel the presence of God in that moment. It is an eye-open benediction; I look into your eyes and you look into mine. And I believe I see Christ in you blessing me; I hope you see Christ in me blessing you. Its all in the eyes and I see something and I feel something. I see God in you and I feel God in you. It is the Aaronic Blessing from the Old Testament book of Numbers 6: 24-26. Named for Aaron, Moses’ brother, who was the High Priest. It is terribly old and ancient blessing. It goes back to the time of the Tabernacle, even before the first Temple in Jerusalem. God blessing His people through the words of the Aaronic Blessing. The Lord God instructs Aaron to use these words; and the Lord God promises that when he does the Lord will come and bless the people. “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you; and be gracious and merciful unto you. The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you, and give you peace. Both now and in the life everlasting. Amen.” Everything that has happened in worship up to that point is for the Lord to come in all His fullness, power, mercy and glory and to bless His people. So I believe.

So it is why I am missing you all this Sunday in worship. For reasons of sheltering in place and seeking not to spread the CoronaVirus you all are worshipping at home. We are worshipping here. So put off your shoes, you are walking on holy ground. Put away the distractions around you. You’re not just listening to a program, you have entered into the presence of a Holy, Holy, Holy God. Quiet your soul; silence the voices in your head. Focus away from the worries and anxieties of life right now and focus on the One True and Living God, He who will save us and rescue us from all diseases, sins and everything that would harm us in life. There at home really worship; expect Him to come; expect Him to speak; expect Him to save; expect Him to bless. O, and I promise you, HE will!

So this portion of Leviticus is God’s instructions to Aaron the high priest. And the Lord God instructs Aaron to conduct the offerings we have been discussing throughout Lent—the burnt offering and the sin offering and the peace offering and the cereal offering. Ah, but this time it comes with a promise. When you sacrifice, then something profound results. The Lord God Almighty promises: “For today the Lord will appear to you.”
It’s a simple observation on my part and it is this ----IF you sacrifice THEN the Lord’s presence will come and He will appear to you. If you want to be in the presence of God, we need to sacrifice. If we want to feel the Lord in all His love and power, if we want to experience Him in all His light and glory, if we want to see Him and feel Him and feel Him at work in our heart and life....FIRST we must sacrifice and only THEN He will come...

First, the sacrifice; then, the blessing. First the sacrifice, then the Lord bless you and keep you and make His face to shine upon you... Get it????? “Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them...”

With what words did he bless them? The words from Numbers, the Aaronic Blessing.

In today’s world we just want the blessing; we don’t want the sacrifice. A lot of worship today is just about feeling good. I like to feel good and have the Holy Spirit, feel a little better about myself, go home, unchanged, slap a little band-aid on the mortal wound of sin; don’t sacrifice anything, don’t give sacrificially of my time or my gifts or my treasure; don’t be changed nor transformed by God. JUST GIVE ME THE BLESSING; DON’T REQUIRE ANYTHING OF ME, LORD. Your mercy and your grace don’t require anything from me, Lord.

Jesus paid it all, so there’s no obligation I feel. Forgiveness is just “being let off the hook” instead of truly repenting, truly sorrowing, truly amending one’s life, truly changing and never doing that same thing ever again. Jesus says to us: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Luke 9: 23) Jesus asks us to pick up OUR CROSS DAILY and follow Him. That’s sacrifice. The Apostle Paul writes: “I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me.” (Galatians 2: 20) That’s sacrifice. It is the crucifixion of self, the pride and the desires, the sin and self-will and the ego; these are the things needful of being sacrificed on the altar of the love of God. These are the things nailed to the cross of Jesus. Ego and self-well, pride and wanting my own will to be done, not God’s will to be done, is what must be nailed on the cross of Christ. Sacrifice.

Somewhere we’ve gotten it in our head that because Jesus has died for our sin once and for all, that there is no more sacrifice required on our part. If there is no sacrifice of self, no death to the old person filled with ego and pride, if we do not die to self, then how can we live for Christ?

First, the sacrifice, then the blessing. That’s what it says in Leviticus. That’s the way its been from the beginning...And Jesus dying on a cross hasn’t changed that; its the example He has set for us. What He has done, we must do. Not happy, clappy, feel a little better about yourself religion –but Sacrifice...

Now right now everyone wants God’s blessing. Inside the church and outside the church, long time Christians and people who never darken the door of the church, all people want God’s blessing now. People are afraid and anxious. Even agnostics are praying. And on some level they know that no matter how much toilet paper they buy, that toilet paper, and their own efforts, will not save them from this pestilence that is stalking us and walking in our streets. We want the Lord to bless us. We need the Lord to keep us and all we love. We want Him to make His face to shine upon us. We need Him to show up and save us. Our souls are at sea and our lives are in turmoil and we desperately need PEACE. Everyone wants the blessing of God, but not many people will do those things to actually receive it.

Beloved, this is the moment to come back to God. To say to Him, “I want my life to be crucified with Your Son, Jesus Christ...” “I indeed will die to self and my own desires that I might live for HIM and live my entire life from this moment henceforth for HIM.” “I offer my body, my self, to you, Lord, a LIVING SACRIFICE today.” Because all these kinds of offerings and sacrifices are what precede God’s presence. Because sacrifice always is required for blessing. That’s the message in the Aaronic Blessing from Leviticus. That’s the blessing we want and that’s the blessing we desperately need today. Amen and Amen.

By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania

IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!