

DEVOTIONAL 8



GOD IN OUR MIDST

EXODUS 31:1-18

¹ The LORD said to Moses, ² “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³ and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, ⁴ to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, ⁵ in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. ⁶ And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: ⁷ the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, ⁸ the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, ⁹ and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, ¹⁰ and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, ¹¹ and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do.”

¹² And the LORD said to Moses, ¹³ “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. ¹⁴ You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. ¹⁵ Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. ¹⁶ Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. ¹⁷ It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.’”

¹⁸ And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

DAY 1

EXODUS 31:1-11

¹ The LORD said to Moses, ² “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³ and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, ⁴ to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, ⁵ in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. ⁶ And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: ⁷ the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, ⁸ the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, ⁹ and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, ¹⁰ and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, ¹¹ and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do.”

We turn this week to Exodus 31 which tells us of the artistic work that went into the making of the tabernacle and the call to Sabbath rest.

Down through the centuries we still know the names of those who were called to devise the tabernacle’s artistic designs: Bezalel and Oholiab. Note the order of events:

the LORD called Bezalel by name to this work
the LORD filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God
the LORD filled Bezalel with ability, intelligence, knowledge, and craftsmanship
the LORD appointed Oholiab with Bezalel to do the work.

God called Bezalel, then gave him everything he needed to answer the call. A few verses later we read that the Lord gave all able men ability, that they may make all that he commanded to Moses. God is giving gifts to his people for the good of the people.

This is the first time someone in scripture is said to be *filled with the Spirit of God*. Tomorrow we'll focus on that and how God continues to fill us today. Our church body needs every single person. Have you ever noticed something that needs correction, or something that would be good to do and thought "Why is no one else seeing this?" Well, something you might want to consider is that perhaps God is calling you to fill a gap among us that only you can fill.

Let's add these verses to our meditation...

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

PRAYER

Dear Lord, we come to you. We praise you for beauty in art and music and for giving us opportunities to create things and rejoice with others who create. Thank you for the diversity of gifts you give us all! Forgive us for any way we are proud of our accomplishments instead of giving you thanks and praise for how you've formed and equipped us. Give us courage and wisdom to hear your call and answer. Give us eyes to see what you've shown us and ways that you've equipped us to serve. Thank you for filling us with your Holy Spirit! Grow wisdom in us to truly understand that you don't call the equipped but you equip the called. Amen.

DAY 2

EXODUS 31:1-5

¹ The LORD said to Moses, ² “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³ and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, ⁴ to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, ⁵ in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft.

We have spent several weeks learning to understand the meaning of our worship and service by looking at how God revealed himself and his plan of redemption to his people long ago through the tabernacle. Today, for the first time, we hear about the source, the inspiration behind the amazing beauty, artistry, and craftsmanship there. After naming Bezalel to oversee the work, God said, “*I have filled him with the Spirit of God*” (Ex.31:3). This filling would not come as a mystical experience, but in giving him the practical gifts needed to accomplish the work.

Our first introduction to the Spirit of God in Genesis 1:2 shows him at work in creation as he hovered over the waters. He was hovering over darkness, chaos, ugliness, and death, incubating order, beauty, and life. He was working then because he would always be working, bringing life out of death. Let’s think about how we can see him at work in the tabernacle and also in our worship at Christ Church.

He is the source of life.

The Israelites’ deliverance from a place of death and enslavement pictures our deliverance. We were dead in our trespasses and sins. We were slaves of an evil master with no way to get free. Christ has set us free and made us alive by his Spirit. We’re filled with resurrection life!

- Are you filled with gratitude and joy as we worship together?

He is the source of unity.

The workers assigned to build the tabernacle were not competing. Their identity as God’s chosen people meant they had one purpose. Many years later, the apostle Paul wrote to believers at Corinth who were living stones in the temple God was building, the church. He said the various gifts they had been given were from the Spirit, given for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7). Their unity pointed to Jesus.

- What gift has the Spirit given you for the common good of our family here at Christ Church?
- Think about how you have been blessed by the gifts of others. How could you encourage someone in their service this week?

He is the source of creativity and beauty.

The Spirit of God gave Bezalel ability, intelligence, knowledge, and craftsmanship to do things that may have surprised him. A willing heart can be released from self-consciousness and freed to create something beautiful for God. There is always a stamp of originality when the Spirit works with individuals as God created them.

- The Spirit's gifts of creativity are experienced every week as we worship and work together. Look for them and celebrate!

The Spirit is given to glorify the Father and the Son.

The Spirit never brings attention to himself, but if he sees an opportunity to bring attention to Jesus, he will shine. All the gifts used to construct the tabernacle were used to point to the centerpiece, the mercy seat where the blood of animals pictured the Lamb of God who would bear away the sin of the world.

- Do our Spirit-gifts direct attention to God and what he has done?

PRAYER

Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on us! We need your wisdom, energy, and creativity to finish the work you have given us to do. We want to work together to create a place of beauty at Christ Church that will be a light in our neighborhood and city. We ask you for boldness to share the gospel wherever we go. In Jesus's name, we pray. Amen.

DAY 3

EXODUS 31:12-14

¹² And the LORD said to Moses, ¹³ “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. ¹⁴ You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

In one of YHWH’s final interactions with Moses on Mount Sinai, he brings up something he has already discussed with the Israelite leader before—Sabbath rest. The Sabbath is not something that YHWH created or initiated with Moses but a creational truth from the beginning (Gen. 2:1-3). It is something that governs YHWH’s people from their inception as his people. Moses knows this. So why remind him? On the one hand, I think Moses needed to be reminded. He was like us—prone to wander, to be so focused on what is in front of us that we may forget something (like the Sabbath) that is so important to us. Just think about the Israelites at this very moment. They are at the bottom of Mount Sinai waiting for Moses to come down. In their anxiety, they forget something important. YHWH is their God, and they are to have no other gods. But what do they do? They fashion a golden calf. Like us, Moses needs to be reminded of God’s call to rest.

Yet at the same time, this passage looks forward. YHWH knows that the Israelites are incapable of keeping his laws, statutes, and commandments perfectly. As hard as they will try (or not try), he knows they can’t possibly keep this up. In this moment, God is reminding Moses how something greater than this commandment is needed. Something more permanent, something that would both keep this law and fulfill it at the same time. The author of Hebrews speaks about this:

“So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest” (Heb 4:9-11a)

Here the author brings up Joshua and the Israelites longing to enter into the “end-time” rest, the ultimate divine rest that is offered by YHWH. They believed that entering into the promised land would bring them that rest.

Where are you looking for rest? Do you look ahead and say things like, “After this stage of life, I’ll get more rest? If I could be in this job, or with this person, or at this church, I’d be able to rest”? Perhaps you look to idleness for rest or to cultural whims.

The rest that is being talked about here doesn’t come from works, and it certainly isn’t something that is deserved. It comes from Jesus’s high-priestly sacrifice. The ESV Study Bible describes this kind of rest: “*The promise of entering now into this rest means ceasing from the spiritual strivings that reflect uncertainty about one’s final destiny; it means enjoyment of being established in the presence of God, to share in the everlasting joy that God entered when he rested on the seventh day (v. 10).*” This rest comes from our relationship with Jesus.

Today, pray with me that we would seek this kind of rest—the same kind of rest God took on the seventh day—through our relationship with Jesus.

PRAYER

Father in heaven, you have given us a model of rest. You worked for six days to create all things. Then on the seventh day, you rested and were refreshed. Oh Lord, how we long for that sort of rest. A rest that goes beyond sleep, beyond a quick breath, beyond idleness amid busyness. We long to enter into the rest you provide through your Son, Jesus. Lead us this day deeper into that sort of rest—an assurance of our place in the family of God and our destiny with you. Give us moments of real rest in our days, moments that point forward to that day when divine rest with our Maker is all we will know. We pray this in the powerful, saving, and rest-providing name of Jesus, our king. Amen.

DAY 4

EXODUS 31:16-17

¹⁶ Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. ¹⁷ It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.”

Observing the Sabbath isn't just a good practice, it communicates that we are covenant people, that we see our need and our place in the covenant family.

The covenant promises to Israel consisted of two primary ideas: the people and the land. The hope was that Israel (the people) would dwell, feast, and walk with God in the land. Israel's participation in the Sabbath was not only a time for them to rest and be refreshed, but it was a weekly reminder of the future hope that they would enter into an everlasting Sabbath. So how does the Sabbath incorporate the promises of the people and the land?

Let's see how Leviticus describes the Sabbath celebration.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, These are the appointed feasts of the Lord that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts. Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places." Leviticus 23:1-3

First, this section of Leviticus is a description of the feasts, and the first feast day mentioned is the Sabbath. Feasts represented the bounty or fruitfulness of the land. They were celebrations of the bounty that the Lord had provided for his people. It was important for the Sabbath celebration that the symbolism of the Lord's provision be preserved. Much as the garden of Eden provided fruit right from the vine, so Israel collected the manna and quail before the Sabbath, and the sale of food was prohibited on the Sabbath. It is not to say that the land was the provider but that God blessed the people by providing through the land.

Second, the Sabbath was a holy convocation. A convocation is a call to gather or assemble God's people. What does it mean that it was a "holy" convocation? We often think of holiness as purity, but holiness only begins with purity or cleanliness and then extends to how the pure thing is set apart and is put into service, for it belongs to the Lord. For instance, the furniture in the tabernacle was made clean and was then considered holy because it was put into service for the Lord. Therefore, the Sabbath was a holy gathering because the people were gathered to be of service to the Lord in their worship. The Sabbath was a sign of covenant living.

"And I said to their children in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols. I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules, and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.' But the children rebelled against me. They did not walk in my statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my Sabbaths." Ezekiel 20:18-21

However, it wasn't enough for Israel to merely participate in the Sabbath; their hearts and actions needed to demonstrate that they were God's people. This was Israel's problem throughout their history. They continually broke God's covenant and profaned the Sabbath. God's judgment resulted in the loss of Sabbath, for instead of being gathered, the people were scattered; instead of feasting on the bounty of the land, Israel was exiled (even when Israel returned to the land they were still exiles there). At the heart of this judgment was a loss of God's presence from which the people and the land of Sabbath flowed.

This judgment was not the loss of hope but a reminder that Israel could not achieve a final everlasting Sabbath or rest on their own. While the practice of the Sabbath did bring rest and refreshment to Israel, it also pointed to something greater, an eternal Sabbath where Israel (and people from all the nations) would be gathered (convocation) and feast with the Lord.

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. Isaiah 25:6

And in that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain at Jerusalem. Isaiah 27:13

The idea of Sabbath is not relegated to the past, for we still respond to a convocation to gather and worship. We see this in our service with the call to worship and people coming together from all around Grand Rapids to minister before the Lord. We also feast at the Lord's Supper. It is a time for us to rest and be refreshed in the Lord. Also, like Israel, we are waiting for an eschatological Sabbath rest where all God's people will be gathered and will feast with the Father face to face.

So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. Hebrews 4:9-11

PRAYER

(From Psalm 63:1-4)

¹ *O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

² *So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.*

³ *Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.*

⁴ *So I will bless you as long as I live;
in your name I will lift up my hands.*

DAY 5

EXODUS 24:12, 31:18

The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.”

And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

With the giving of the stone tablets, we have reached a culmination point in Exodus. In the Ancient Near East, common treaty practices between a sovereign and vassal included making a copy of the document for both parties. So that is what the two tablets were as opposed to page one and two of the Ten Commandments. The tablets established the covenant. They formalized the relationship. After pursuing the Israelites, liberating them, protecting them, and teaching them how to build a community, God details how worship should be practiced in their relationship with Him. The stone documents, written by the finger of God, made it clear that God created and established the relationship and maintained it by His presence.

At this point, the Israelites have been taught what to do and how to do it. They understand YHWH’s capabilities. They know his power to deliver and change their circumstances. They know how he protects and leads them. They know how he provides for them in the middle of the desert. They know how he wants to dwell in their midst, not just in the tabernacle, but in their minds and hearts as well. YHWH has brought them out of slavery and made them into a nation with a promised future. They should see how much he loves them and how much he wants for them.

God has given these Israelites all the tools they need to get to the promised land. They have the information they need. They can see the path they have to travel. Sadly, however, we know that the story of the next couple hundred years is a ragged one. The Israelites forget. They ignore. They disobey, starting from the time Moses is on Mt. Sinai receiving the stone tablets. These events raise the question, “What more could God have done?”

Through the whole of scripture, we know that God’s plan is bigger than what we see in Exodus. We’re given a taste here, but we know that these writings and events point to yet bigger events that once and for all will resolve the problem of Israel’s and our inability to follow and obey.

PRAYER

Thank you, Father, that in your sovereignty you have created a better way, a permanent solution to our condition. Thank you too that we have another promise of a new everlasting home with you. As we live this life, help us to keep that eternal life in view.