

“LEVITICUS AND THE PRIEST WITH DISABILITIES: A JOB DESCRIPTION

Notes by Bill Gaventa

Using verses from Leviticus..on priests. Note that none of this refers to hidden disabilities, but only visible ones. Priests can do the other duties. Other duties that involve speaking only related to one priest, once a year.

Nothing that prevents irregular non-high priests from officiating at the altar.

Blemish is not the equivalent of disability.

Blemishes do not provide a justification for barring people with disabilities from being priests. There are many highly visible activities that a priest can do, e.g. purification rituals that do not involve the high altar.

Priest considered holy and pure even if they have blemish. Regarded as pure because he is allowed to eat holy food. If became impure, could not eat the holy food. Impurity and blemish are not the same. never uses the word impure to describe person with blemish.

If you are laity, not part of Aaron, you cannot eat the holy food. Layperson without a blemish did not have access to holy food in the same way that a priest with blemish does.

Disability not the key issue. It is impurity. If you are layperson with disability, Leviticus does not care. Complexities of identity.

Lev. 21 does not disbar from serving as priests. Others try to justify that exclusion.

What qualifies any priest? Not what disqualifies a priest.

Physical attraction is not a qualification. Never offers a description of physical attributes. They are not nondescript. Make holy garments that are beautiful, don't care if the priest is beautiful.

Had to approach the altar with the right garments. Priest without an altar could only come near with the holy garments. (support technology for non disabled).

Same instructions for vestments as for tabernacle. Holy garments and curtain are similar. Allows him to blend in with the curtain. Holy garment functions at camouflage. If person with blemish approaches altar, he will not blend in as much as others. He would stand out.

Many of us with disabilities don't blend in any well. Pressure to cover is immense. If accepted, passing is unnecessary.

Start with experiences of living with disabilities. If I had a conversation with a priest, our religious common ground might be very short. Could use experience of disability to talk about our lives, standing out vs blend in, pressure to pass, and what it reveals about our communities.