

This last week was the 20th anniversary of the founding of MCPC.

For the first eleven years of her existence,
 there was a lot of set-up and tear-down work every week.
 Jay often recounts the stages of the our wandering –
 stages that at times sounds like Israel in the wilderness.
 And certainly the members of Michiana Covenant
 knew all about the hard work that went into setting up chairs,
 setting up the pulpit and table,
 changing the room over from Sunday school to sanctuary –
 and then from sanctuary to fellowship meal.

For the last nine years we have forgotten about how much work goes on behind the scenes.
 A permanent building can make you think that we are a “fixture” here.
 And sometimes we can forget all the work that was needed to get here.

Over the last few months, we have been reminded!

Whether Nathan and Andrew flying to Philadelphia and loading up the pews –
 or Hugh and Jacob constructing, deconstructing, and then reconstructing
 the pulpit platform –
 or Rachael, Karen, Deborah, Ginger and all the other sanders –
 or Phyllis bringing in lunch on Saturday,
 and Myrle and Betty showing up to do whatever needs to be done –

 there has been a lot of “behind the scenes” work
 that has been necessary to get this far.

Chapter 4 explains how God commanded Israel to take care of all the “behind the scenes” work
 of setting up and tearing down and carrying the tabernacle.

As we go through this, I want you to see that the physical labor involved in this
 was intended from the start to have a spiritual dimension to it.
 The physical structure of the tabernacle *embodies* the spiritual structure of the church,
 so we shouldn’t be surprised to see all sorts of parallels
 between the tabernacle and the church.

Hebrews 9 says that all the details of the tabernacle pointed to Christ,
 “of these things we cannot now speak in detail” (9:5 tells us).
 All of these things were imperfect shadows of Christ – the one to whom all things point.

Introduction: The Generations of Aaron and Moses (3:1-4)

These are the generations of Aaron and Moses at the time when the LORD spoke with Moses on

Mount Sinai.

Chapter 3 opens with a riff from Genesis:

“These are the generations of Aaron and Moses...”

While the word “generations” has been used earlier in Numbers 1 several times,
this phrase “eleh toledot” has not been seen since Genesis 37 –
which spoke of the “generations of Jacob.”

This is the phrase that structures the book of Genesis.
Otherwise it only occurs here, at the end of the book of Ruth,
and in Chronicles.

If you think of it strictly as a genealogical term, you will be disappointed.

It says, these are the generations of Aaron and Moses,
but then it only names the sons of Aaron.
This is their story.

Verses 2-4 remind us of what had happened back in Leviticus 10.

² These are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ³ These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he ordained to serve as priests. ⁴ But Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of Aaron their father.

Yes, Aaron had four sons, but the two eldest were struck down by God
when they offered strange fire on the altar.

This reminder of what had happened to Aaron’s own sons
serves to highlight the importance of worship –
and the reason why the tribe of Levi was appointed
“to keep guard” over Aaron and over the whole congregation.

God is holy.

You cannot come into the presence of a holy God if you are tainted.

We usually focus on the *sin* part of the equation.

We usually say that you cannot come into the presence of God if you are tainted by sin.

But throughout the scriptures there is a bigger problem.

The problem is that *creation itself* is tainted.

Man’s sin resulted not only in death for himself,
but also a flawed and broken creation.

If you just think of sin as an individual thing – then the OT will make no sense,
and you will horribly misunderstand the NT as well!

Nadab and Abihu weren't necessarily "bad people."
They were probably decent folks – just trying to do their job.
We don't know exactly what the "unauthorized fire" was –
maybe they tried to take a shortcut and took fire from their own hearth
to light the incense in the holy place.

But God is holy.
If God has told you what you are to do, and how you are to do it,
then you don't do it any other way!
What difference does it make?
Fire is fire, right?
No!
Sin has tainted the creation – even fire is not necessarily pure!

And so all the purity laws in the OT were designed to show Israel
the need for the creation to be restored.

We are alienated from God because of sin –
and therefore we are alienated from others
(we're afraid of them – we mistreat them –
they mistreat us)
and we are alienated from creation
(we're out of tune with nature – we mistreat creation –
and it mistreats us!)
and we are also alienated from ourselves!

One purpose of the Levites was to protect Aaron from contamination from the outside.
But the other purpose of the Levites was to protect Israel from Aaron.
If you live in a world that is alienated from God,
then when God enters that world, you are in grave danger!

But God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

When God comes and meets with Aaron – that's astounding (and dangerous).
But when God takes our humanity upon himself –
when the Creator becomes part of his creation –
that's not just astounding and dangerous –
that is nothing less than life from the dead.

And we see the first faint stirrings of this in chapters 3-4 of Numbers,
as we see the importance of worship in chapter 3 in the gift of the Levites to Aaron,
and the importance of the behind the scenes details of chapter 4.

1. The Gift of the Levites to Aaron: the Importance of Worship (3:5-51)

a. First Speech: Levi Given to Aaron (v5-10)

13 times in these four chapters, the LORD spoke to Moses:

five times in chapter 3 regarding the redemption of the firstborn;

three times in chapter 4 regarding the duties of the Levites

(the first two times the LORD addressed Aaron as well);

three times in chapter 5 regarding the holiness required of the whole camp;

and twice in chapter 6 regarding Nazirites and the priestly blessing.

⁵ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁶ “Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister to him. ⁷ They shall keep guard over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle. ⁸ They shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle. ⁹ And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel. ¹⁰ And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard their priesthood. But if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death.”

We have seen that in Hebrew the idea of the *helper*

is one who does what you could not do for yourself.

The Levites, however, are *not* helpers.

They are assistants and servants – they are at his command.

They are doing things that Aaron and his sons *could* do (if they had time),

but their tasks are designed to free up Aaron and his sons

for the particular responsibilities of the priesthood.

Many have noticed the parallels between the appointment of the Levites

and the institution of deacons in the book of Acts.

In Acts 6, you have the “twelve” – who wish to devote themselves to the Word and prayer

but there are all these day-to-day responsibilities that get in the way.

So they appoint the “seven” to take care of the administration of the church

(in Acts 6 the issue is making sure that all the widows are properly cared for),

so that they can focus on the ministry of the Word and prayer.

Of course, the difference between Levites and deacons is that the Levites serve

on behalf of the people of God – and woe to the Reubenite who tries to help!

while the deacons are encouraged to *lead* the people of God in service!

This unique function of the Levite is explained more in verses 11-13:

b. Second Speech: the Levites Will Replace the Firstborn (v11-13)

¹¹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹² “Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, ¹³ for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the

firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the LORD.”

In verse 13 God reminds Moses of what he had said in Exodus 13.

In Exodus 13, God had said, “Consecrate to me all the firstborn.”

And he spelled out what this meant in Exodus 13:11-16:

the firstborn of every animal had to be sacrificed,
and the firstborn of every woman had to be redeemed by sacrifice.

In some ancient cultures, the firstborn son would be sacrificed to the gods
as an expression of devotion and service – the most precious gift imaginable.

God forbade the practice of human sacrifice,

but he called Israel instead to offer their firstborn *in service* to God.

The idea was that the firstborn of Israel would serve as a sort of priesthood.

They were consecrated to God – and to his service.

(Think of Samuel.

He was from the tribe of Ephraim –

but his mother dedicated him to the service of the priests.

In the original plan of the Exodus,

this is what would have happened to all firstborn sons.

Apparently it remained an option for at least a while.)

God claims the firstfruits – the firstborn – for himself –

as a reminder that *all* that we have belongs to him.

But here, in Numbers 3, God says that he is replacing the firstborn with the Levites.

God had placed a premium on the heads of the firstborn.

God had said to Pharaoh,

“Israel is my son, my firstborn. Let my son go that he may serve me –

if you refuse to let him go, I will kill your firstborn son!” (Ex 4:22)

God’s judgment then fell upon the firstborn of Egypt –

and the firstborn of Israel were redeemed.

c. Third Speech: the Census of the Levites (v14-39)

¹⁴ *And the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying,* ¹⁵ *“List the sons of Levi, by fathers' houses and by clans; every male from a month old and upward you shall list.”* ¹⁶ *So Moses listed them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded.* ¹⁷ *And these were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon and Kohath and Merari.* ¹⁸ *And these are the names of the sons of Gershon by their clans: Libni and Shimei.* ¹⁹ *And the sons of Kohath by their clans: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.* ²⁰ *And the sons of Merari by their clans: Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites, by their fathers' houses.*

Verses 14-20 describes the census of the Levites.

As we saw last time, the census of Israel was designed to number the warriors.
The Levites were not supposed to be warriors,
so they were not included in *that* census.

Their own census was designed to number every male from a month old and upward.

The point of *this* census was that the Levites were supposed to replace the firstborn,
and so they needed to know how many Levites there were –
and how many firstborn.

At the same time, the census of the Levites also provides their camping order
and their particular duties in serving the priests.

i. Gershon on the West: the Service of the Tabernacle (v21-26)

²¹ To Gershon belonged the clan of the Libnites and the clan of the Shimeites; these were the clans of the Gershonites. ²² Their listing according to the number of all the males from a month old and upward was^[a] 7,500. ²³ The clans of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle on the west, ²⁴ with Eliasaph, the son of Lael as chief of the fathers' house of the Gershonites. ²⁵ And the guard duty of the sons of Gershon in the tent of meeting involved the tabernacle, the tent with its covering, the screen for the entrance of the tent of meeting, ²⁶ the hangings of the court, the screen for the door of the court that is around the tabernacle and the altar, and its cords—all the service connected with these.

Gershon was to camp on the west – behind the tabernacle –
and Gershon was charged with carrying and guarding the tabernacle.

ii. Kohath on the South: the Service of the Sanctuary (v27-32)

²⁷ To Kohath belonged the clan of the Amramites and the clan of the Izharites and the clan of the Hebronites and the clan of the Uzzielites; these are the clans of the Kohathites. ²⁸ According to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, there were 8,600, keeping guard over the sanctuary. ²⁹ The clans of the sons of Kohath were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle, ³⁰ with Elizaphan the son of Uzziel as chief of the fathers' house of the clans of the Kohathites. ³¹ And their guard duty involved the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the vessels of the sanctuary with which the priests minister, and the screen; all the service connected with these. ³² And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest was to be chief over the chiefs of the Levites, and to have oversight of those who kept guard over the sanctuary.

Kohath camped on the south side –
and they were charged with carrying and guarding the furniture of the sanctuary.

These two were under the oversight of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest.

iii. Merari on the North: the Service of the Pillars (v33-37)

³³ To Merari belonged the clan of the Mahlites and the clan of the Mushites: these are the clans of Merari. ³⁴ Their listing according to the number of all the males from a month old and upward was 6,200. ³⁵ And the chief of the fathers' house of the clans of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail. They were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle. ³⁶ And the appointed guard duty of the sons of Merari involved the frames of the tabernacle, the bars, the pillars, the bases, and all their accessories; all the service connected with these; ³⁷ also the pillars around the court, with their bases and pegs and cords.

Merari camped on the north side –
and they were charged with carrying and guarding the outer court of the tabernacle.

It's worth noting in these descriptions of their duties,
that these duties are quite specific to the wilderness camp.
There is no hint here of what the Levites will do in the Promised Land.

In fact, it appears from Joshua and Judges and Samuel,
that the Levites spread out throughout Israel
(Moses himself gave them certain cities throughout Israel).

But it was only at the time of David
that the Levites were renewed in their office of service to the priests.

iv. Moses, Aaron and His Sons on the East (v38-39)

³⁸ Those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tent of meeting toward the sunrise, were Moses and Aaron and his sons, guarding the sanctuary itself, to protect^[b] the people of Israel. And any outsider who came near was to be put to death. ³⁹ All those listed among the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron listed at the commandment of the LORD, by clans, all the males from a month old and upward, were 22,000.

Then Moses and Aaron and his sons are to camp in front of the tabernacle on the east.
They were to guard the entrance to the sanctuary,
to protect the people of Israel from the holiness of God.

Now, if you've been adding up the numbers, you may be puzzled by verse 39.
 $7500 + 8600 + 6200 = 22,300$

But verse 39 says that there were only 22,000 Levites.
And if you go further into the passage,
it's clear that there were 22,273 firstborn in Israel,
leaving an extra 273 firstborn.

Most scholars resolve this by suggesting that there was a copyist error,
and that the 8600 Kohathites should be 8300 (8300 appears in a few ancient translations).

d. Fourth Speech: the Census of the Firstborn (v40-43)

⁴⁰ *And the LORD said to Moses, “List all the firstborn males of the people of Israel, from a month old and upward, taking the number of their names. ⁴¹ And you shall take the Levites for me—I am the LORD—instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the cattle of the people of Israel.” ⁴² So Moses listed all the firstborn among the people of Israel, as the LORD commanded him. ⁴³ And all the firstborn males, according to the number of names, from a month old and upward as listed were 22,273.*

Verses 40-43 then recount the census of the firstborn males one month and older – totaling 22,273.

As I suggested last week, this is another puzzling number.

If there were 603,550 warriors in Israel,
then most of those warriors should have at least one son –
and there should be at least 500,000 firstborn.

Now, some have argued that the firstborn males referred to in verse 43
are only those firstborn males born since the Exodus –
when God gave the rule regarding the consecration of the firstborn.

That sounds good at first, until you do the math:

22,000 births in a year would be a rather high birth rate (90 per thousand,
which is double the highest birthrate in the world today).

But 22,000 *firstborn males* in a year would require an astronomical birthrate.

Further, there is nothing in the text that suggests that “firstborn males”
is limited to those born “since the Exodus.”

The text speaks of firstborn males of the people of Israel, from a month old and upward –
using the same language used of the Levites, from a month old and upward.

e. Fifth Speech: the Redemption of the Levites (v44-51)

⁴⁴ *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁴⁵ “Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle. The Levites shall be mine: I am the LORD. ⁴⁶ And as the redemption price for the 273 of the firstborn of the people of Israel, over and above the number of the male Levites, ⁴⁷ you shall take five shekels^[c] per head; you shall take them according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel of twenty gerahs^[d]), ⁴⁸ and give the money to Aaron and his sons as the redemption price for those who are over.” ⁴⁹ So Moses took the redemption money from those who were over and above those redeemed by the Levites. ⁵⁰ From the firstborn of the people of Israel he took the money, 1,365 shekels, by the shekel of the sanctuary. ⁵¹ And Moses gave the redemption money to Aaron and his sons, according to the word of the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses.*

Chapter 3 concludes with the redemption of the Levites.

There were 22,000 Levites, and 22,273 firstborn Israelites.

And so the LORD commanded Moses to charge five shekels per head

as the redemption price for the extra 273 firstborns.
It says that the money came *from* the firstborn of the people of Israel –
again suggesting that these include the *adult* firstborns –
and not just those who are less than a year old.

But let's not get so caught up in the numbers that we lose sight of what Numbers is doing!
The *point* of the Levites is that they will function as the *firstborn* of Israel.
God had said, "Israel is my son, my firstborn, let my son go that he may serve me."

Then God had appointed the firstborn of Israel to be consecrated to his service.
Now God selects the Levites to function as the firstborn of Israel.

Why do I keep saying this?

Because Adam had been called by God to guard and work the Garden in Eden.
Adam was God's firstborn.

In the Exodus Israel was called to be God's firstborn –
and the Levites are called to guard and work in the Tabernacle.
All the nations around Israel had statues of mythical beasts and deities
surrounding their temples – protecting and guarding their holy places.
But while there *are* cherubim woven in the fabrics of the tabernacle,
there are no statues – no graven images – protecting the sanctuary.

That task fell to the image of God – man.

And now Jesus is the image of the invisible God –
the firstborn of creation and the firstborn from the dead (Col 1),
and we have been adopted in him and made partakers of his inheritance.

And the firstborn had to be redeemed – life for life – by the Levites.
To redeem a life is costly –
namely, to redeem a life *costs a life*.

And since there were not enough Levites to cover the redemption cost of the firstborn,
the leftover firstborns had to pay a redemption price as well.

We are a sort of Levitical community – redeemed by the blood of the Lamb –
and called to guard and work in God's holy temple,
as our Lord and Savior continues to build his holy dwelling place!

And just as God called Israel *in twelve tribes* to be a holy community –
so also he calls the church – *following the twelve apostles* – to be a holy community.
This is why we confess, "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church."
Rome's chief error is making their unity depend on being in fellowship with one man

(other than Christ).

Christ appointed twelve apostles.

We are to be connected with each other in the Christian community –

we are to be in fellowship with one another –

but that unity cannot be confused with uniformity.

Unity and diversity must be expressed in the church –

even as it is expressed in the Triune God.

Last week, we saw the unity and diversity of the people of God in the 12 tribes.

Tonight we see these same principles expressed in the ordained leadership of the church.

2. The Duties of the Levites: the Hard Work *Behind the Scenes* (4:1-49)

a. First Speech: the Duties of Adult Kohathites in the Sanctuary under Eleazar (v1-16)

The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ² “Take a census of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, by their clans and their fathers' houses, ³ from thirty years old up to fifty years old, all who can come on duty, to do the work in the tent of meeting. ⁴ This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tent of meeting: the most holy things. ⁵ When the camp is to set out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it. ⁶ Then they shall put on it a covering of goatskin^[e] and spread on top of that a cloth all of blue, and shall put in its poles. ⁷ 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 showbread also shall be on it. ⁸ Then they shall spread over them a cloth of scarlet and cover the same with a covering of goatskin, and shall put in its poles. ⁹ And they shall take a cloth of blue and cover the lampstand for the light, with its lamps, its tongs, its trays, and all the vessels for oil with which it is supplied. ¹⁰ And they shall put it with all its utensils in a covering of goatskin and put it on the carrying frame. ¹¹ And over the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue and cover it with a covering of goatskin, and shall put in its poles. ¹² 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 goatskin and put them on the carrying frame. ¹³ And they shall take away the ashes from the altar and spread a purple cloth over it. ¹⁴ 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 goatskin, and shall put in its poles. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ “And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest shall have charge of the oil for the light, the fragrant incense, the regular grain offering, and the anointing oil, with the oversight of the whole tabernacle and all that is in it, of the sanctuary and its vessels.”

The Kohathites were charged with carrying the holy things.

Aaron and his sons (the priests) were supposed to cover the holy things,
so that the Kohathites would not touch them.

Verses 5-14 explain how Aaron and his sons should cover everything with goatskins,
and either put it in a carrying frame, or insert its poles.

That way the Kohathites could come in and carry them away.

If you take the time to think through the process described in these verses,
you quickly realize that the tabernacle would have required considerable time for set-up –
probably not the sort of thing that you would do
unless you were planning on staying somewhere for a while!

You have to make sure that you don't unwrap the holy things until the tent is fully set up
(otherwise you might cause the death of a Kohathite!).

And that's the point of God's next speech in verses 17-20:

i. Second Speech: the Warning to the Kohathites (v17-20)

¹⁷ The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ¹⁸ "Let not the tribe of the clans of the Kohathites be destroyed from among the Levites, ¹⁹ but deal thus with them, that they may live and not die when they come near to the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint them each to his task and to his burden, ²⁰ but they shall not go in to look on the holy things even for a moment, lest they die."

What is God teaching us?

God is teaching his people that he is *holy*.

The earthly Holy of Holies was designed to be the place where God met with man.

But ever since the fall, man is *not* holy.

How can a holy God meet with unholy man?

God's holiness will destroy unholy man.

(That's what had happened to Nadab and Abihu)

And so, when God's glory filled the tabernacle,

everything *in* the tabernacle became tinged with God's glory.

God's holiness radiated from those golden objects –

just as God's holiness radiated from the face of Moses

after Moses had met with God in the tent of meeting.

This is why the incarnation of the Son of God is so central to Christian theology and practice.

If God has come in the flesh,

that means that God has so sanctified flesh and blood

that flesh and blood have now become a fit dwelling place for God's holiness.

But that's why Paul also continues the warnings of Numbers 4 in 1 Cor 11.
It's not that *seeing* the bread and the wine will result in your death –
but *partaking* of the bread and the wine *apart from faith in Christ*.
Eating and drinking unworthily, selfishly, thoughtlessly –
Paul even says that some people in the first century had *died*
because they partook of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner.

In the OT that was true of all the holy objects.

But since all the holy objects were pointing to Jesus,
therefore the only holy objects in our worship are the bread and the wine –
the elements of which Jesus said, "This is my body...and...blood"

b. Third Speech: the Duties of Adult Merarites and Gershonites under Ithamar (v21-33)

²¹ *The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,* ²² *"Take a census of the sons of Gershon also, by their fathers' houses and by their clans. ²³ From thirty years old up to fifty years old, you shall list them, all who can come to do duty, to do service in the tent of meeting. ²⁴ This is the service of the clans of the Gershonites, in serving and bearing burdens: ²⁵ they shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting with its covering and the covering of goatskin that is on top of it and the screen for the entrance of the tent of meeting ²⁶ and the hangings of the court and the screen for the entrance of the gate of the court that is around the tabernacle and the altar, and their cords and all the equipment for their service. And they shall do all that needs to be done with regard to them. ²⁷ All the service of the sons of the Gershonites shall be at the command of Aaron and his sons, in all that they are to carry and in all that they have to do. And you shall assign to their charge all that they are to carry. ²⁸ This is the service of the clans of the sons of the Gershonites in the tent of meeting, and their guard duty is to be under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.*

²⁹ *"As for the sons of Merari, you shall list them by their clans and their fathers' houses. ³⁰ From thirty years old up to fifty years old, you shall list them, everyone who can come on duty, to do the service of the tent of meeting. ³¹ And this is what they are charged to carry, as the whole of their service in the tent of meeting: the frames of the tabernacle, with its bars, pillars, and bases, ³² and the pillars around the court with their bases, pegs, and cords, with all their equipment and all their accessories. And you shall list by name the objects that they are required to carry.*

³³ *This is the service of the clans of the sons of Merari, the whole of their service in the tent of meeting, under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest."*

Verses 21-28 recounts the service of the sons of Gershon – carrying the curtains and hangings,
and verses 29-33 recounts that of the sons of Merari – carrying the frames and bases.

It's not glamorous work –
but it is necessary for the work of the church.

I remember that when I was in college, I wanted to teach the adult Sunday school.
I had learned so much that I wanted to share with everyone else!

So I went to the pastor and asked if I could teach.
He knew what I needed.
I didn't need to teach.
I needed humility.
So he gave me the task of recording and duplicating sermons.

The everyday, ordinary work of cleaning, copying, serving, administrating –
all the menial tasks of sanding, scraping, cutting, painting –
these are ways that we love one another as Christ loved us.

The Kohathites couldn't say,
“We're better than you because we get to carry the sanctuary furniture”
(well, they tried – and the earth swallowed up Korah and his friends!)
It's very much like what Paul says in 1 Corinthians –
the parts of the body need each other!
(Interestingly, he reflects on this in 1 Cor 12,
shortly after his comments about Israel in the wilderness in 1 Corinthians 10!)

Chapter 4 then concludes by pointing out that Moses and Aaron *did* as the LORD commanded
(verses 34-49)

c. Moses and Aaron Did as the LORD Commanded (v34-49)

i. They Listed the Sons of Kohath (v34-37)

³⁴ *And Moses and Aaron and the chiefs of the congregation listed the sons of the Kohathites, by their clans and their fathers' houses, ³⁵ from thirty years old up to fifty years old, everyone who could come on duty, for service in the tent of meeting; ³⁶ and those listed by clans were 2,750. ³⁷ This was the list of the clans of the Kohathites, all who served in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron listed according to the commandment of the LORD by Moses.*

ii. They Listed the Sons of Gershon (v38-41)

³⁸ *Those listed of the sons of Gershon, by their clans and their fathers' houses, ³⁹ from thirty years old up to fifty years old, everyone who could come on duty for service in the tent of meeting— ⁴⁰ those listed by their clans and their fathers' houses were 2,630. ⁴¹ This was the list of the clans of the sons of Gershon, all who served in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron listed according to the commandment of the LORD. □*

iii. They Listed the Sons of Merari (v42-45)

⁴² *Those listed of the clans of the sons of Merari, by their clans and their fathers' houses, ⁴³ from thirty years old up to fifty years old, everyone who could come on duty, for service in the tent of meeting— ⁴⁴ those listed by clans were 3,200. ⁴⁵ This was the list of the clans of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron listed according to the commandment of the LORD by Moses.*

iv. Conclusion (v46-49)

⁴⁶ *All those who were listed of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the chiefs of Israel listed,*

by their clans and their fathers' houses, ⁴⁷ from thirty years old up to fifty years old, everyone who could come to do the service of ministry and the service of bearing burdens in the tent of meeting, ⁴⁸ those listed were 8,580. ⁴⁹ According to the commandment of the LORD through Moses they were listed, each one with his task of serving or carrying. Thus they were listed by him, as the LORD commanded Moses.

They took the census of the Levites.

Now, when it came to the “on duty” members of the tribe,
that was limited to those who were 30-50 years of age.
Anyone over the age of 20 could go to war,
but service in the serving and carrying tasks for the tabernacle
was restricted to those from 30-50 years of age
(namely, sufficient maturity *and* sufficient strength to do the job).

In conclusion, we see once again how Moses did what “the LORD commanded Moses.”
This is something of a refrain at the beginning of Numbers.

Nine times in the opening four chapters, we are told that Moses and/or the people
“did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses.” (1:54)

We often think about Israel’s rebellion in the desert.
But we need to start our tour of the Wilderness
by remembering the redemption of the Firstborn –
and the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ revealed dimly through the shadows.

And because Jesus has brought us into fellowship with himself,
therefore this is what faithful wilderness life looks like.

Life in the wilderness means that we need each other.
We need to be faithful at doing *our* part in the body of Christ.
The body doesn’t function correctly unless every part is working together.

So, whether in this temporary transition time as we get the building ready for use –
or in the ongoing life of the body of Christ –