

Good morning
Welcome one and all to our mispaha
It is our pleasure to welcome you all here
In this beautiful place
And it is our pleasure to welcome those of you
Watching from home

We have Peter and Aiden to thank for that opportunity
They come and schlep the equipment
To record and make the class available
On the Emmanuel Lutheran Church website
For those who can't join us in person
And for those who may want to hear it again
and we're all grateful

I expect we will grow in numbers
As the weather cools and our snowbirds
Fly south again
And
We hope now you snow birds are joining us virtually
Until you meet us here in person
We look forward to being together
And we look forward to welcoming new members
To our mispaha

So what have we been doing here?

We've been traveling with the Israelites
And it's been a
Pretty exciting trip so far
First
The great escape

From Egypt
Across the Red Sea
Then
The desert trek
Hardships and miracles
And here we are now
Camped at the foot of Sinai
Following God's instructions
Building instructions

God is telling the people how he wants his tabernacle built
And he's quite fussy
Maybe not fussy
maybe particular is a better word

And specific
God is definitely specific about
How he wants the tabernacle built
How he wants the tent covered
3 or 4 layers of covering
What kind of curtains he likes
How he wants the furnishings of the tent
To look
How he wants the whole place
to smell
That's what we're dealing with today
Smelling good

Last week we read all about looking good
God wants his priests looking good
Hold that thought

Because I'm going to stop here for just a moment
To clear up something with you all
It has to do with
pronoun usage
I just told you
God wants HIS priests looking good
His is a pronoun
Pronouns
They are in all the news today
Some people think
It's a Very modern and somewhat controversial subject

He she they it
How do you refer to you?
Are you a
He she or they?

For many of us
This is not an issue
But
For others it is

Now
What I want to address briefly
Is the pronoun I've been using to refer to God
I have been saying
He and his and himself
When I refer to God

God frees HIS people
HE wants to dwell with HIS people

And God tells us this HIMSELF
In these chapters of Exodus

See what I mean?
I have been using the masculine singular pronoun
When I refer to God

What does that mean?
Well
It certainly does not mean that I believe
That God
Can be confined to anything I can dream up for him
Or her
Or it
Or they

Now
When I pray
When I talk to God
I call God
you
Hey you, God
I've got a problem that only you can solve
But
When I talk about God
That's a different story
Isn't it?

Today we have choices
He she it they
And

Since my faith tradition is trinitarian
God is
Father Son and Holy Spirit
That sounds like they
So when you talk to the trinity
You address them as you plural
Right?

Or in my hometown
New York
some say
Yous
Hey are yous listening to me?
But
In my husband's hometown
Birmingham Alabama
Some say you all
They really say
Y'all
Are y'all up there? I need y'all

For some
They
may seem an appropriate pronoun
to refer to the 1 God in 3 persons
Now I don't know about you
But I rarely think
That I am speaking to all 3 of them at the same time

Listen you guys
Father Son and Spirit
That Just doesn't sound right to me

What do you think about God's pronouns?

In my tradition it is believed God incarnates in Jesus Christ
Christ says I and the father are one
And since Jesus was born a male
And stayed that way
I always felt comfortable referring to them
As he
God the father
No brainer
he
God The son
Another no brainer
he
And
I hardly ever think about it
And
I'm also
perfectly comfortable calling the spirit he

Although I believe God truly is
non gendered
God transcends gender
God is not us
God is beyond us

And this is true for Jews, Christians, and Muslims
But also true
Jews, Christians, and Muslims
mostly
Refer to God and Jesus, and Allah

As He

So that's what I will be doing during our studies
I will almost always call God
he

So what about you?
What do you think?

Should we be more inclusive
When it comes to God?

Almost every main line Christian community
Is holding these discussions
At synodical conferences and council meetings
And
there are hundreds of
Gender study theological scholars who are writing
And selling
Books to advise you about this
Honestly
It can make you crazy
So
Should you call God
He she or it or they
or all of the above?

Can't you just hear God saying
I don't care what you call me
Just call me
I hear that
Now let's call on God as we

Get back to Exodus

Chapter 30

Which is sort of an appendix to the

Instructions that we've been reading for weeks

We start today with incense

We all know what incense is

And

Doesn't it seem that incense is one of those things

That you either love it or hate it

You think it

Smells great or smells awful

For the ancients incense was widely used

But

Important to remember the ancients lived in a

Stinky world

So incense was probably a welcomed alternative

To dirty body smells

Animal smells

No plumbing smells

Get the picture?

Can you smell it?

And remember we're talking about the tabernacle now

God's house

With a big altar in front of it

Where animals were kept and slaughtered

As part of the worship service

Clearly the priests needed something to cover up that odor

Or the people would not have stuck around
And God wouldn't have either

But apart from the practical use of odor masking
Incense was then and still is now
very symbolic

It's a reminder
Of the Lord's presence
That sweet smell reminds us of
Our sweet Lord

And the smoke of the incense rises
Just like our prayers rise
Right up to God

For the priestly writer of our parsha today
Incense is very important

Just look at where he places the incense altar
Right outside the curtain that veils
The special chamber, the holy of holies
On an altar

And that's how chapter 30 begins
God says to Moses
You shall make an altar for burning incense
God tells Moses the size it should be
A 1 and 1/2 feet square sized table
About 3 feet high
Made of acacia wood
With lots of gold

It's not large
It doesn't have to be
this table is just for burning incense
No animals sacrificed here

And God tells them to place it
Where I shall meet you

Now the next verses describe the proper practice
With the incense altar
And these rules are meant to perpetual

The priests are in charge
They have to tend to the lamps and the incense table
Regularly
Every morning and every twilight
And like everything else in these instructions
God appears to be fussy or particular

And the incense altar like the lamps
Have to be cleaned once a year
And that once a year day is Yom Kippur
This year September 24
We'll talk more about this holiday
Very significant and holy day

But for now that's the end of the incense talk here
In this parsha
But
We will read more about incense later in scripture
Lots written about incense in scripture

David

King David wrote a whole psalm about it

Psalms 141

David describes his prayers as incense

And

Isaiah writes about incense a lot

And

The gospel writers refer to incense more than once

What does Luke say Zachariah was doing when the Lord called him?

He was burning incense in the house of the Lord

And then poof

Remember an Angel appears to announce a miraculous event

This very very old couple

They are going to have a son

They will name him John

He becomes a Baptist

The Baptist

Is anyone here into the Book of Revelation?

Lots and lots of incense in that book

Pots of it

And Muslims burn incense today
just like the prophet did then

We have lots of modern incense
on our grocery shelves today

We can spray liquified incense

We can

Plug incense into our electrical sources

Modern odor maskers are big sellers
Big business
But they don't get the job done
Visually

Torah says
We should be able to smell it
And see it
We should be able to see the fragrant smoke
As it rises
Nice image

But now
Bam
there is a big interruption in the text
We were contemplative
Smelling
seeing the incense
And now
BAM
Verse 12
God tells Moses to take a census
No more incense
Here's exactly what God says
About it

When you take a census of the Israelite people
According to the enrollment
Each shall pay to the Lord a ransom
For himself for being enrolled
That no plague shall come upon them

God goes on to say
That each man age 20 and up
Shall pay a half shekel
By the sanctuary weight
20 gerahs to the shekel

God makes sure Moses tells the people
Every man over 20 years of age must pay one half a shekel
And here's the interesting part
God adds
The rich shall not pay more
And the poor shall not pay less

And then God sums up the census this way

The money made from the census
Shall be assigned to the service of the Tent of the Tabernacle
It shall serve as a reminder of your expiation for your persons

Expiation means reparation
You should pay for your guilt
for your wrongdoings
What ever that may be

See what I mean about this census sounding
Out of place
It is sort of just stuck right after the plans
For the incense altar
And we'll see in just a moment
Right before the plans for building
The big brass bath tub

Called a laver
Seems strange
Especially since

For the ancients a census was not a welcomed event
And this was true throughout Mesopotamia
Not just Israel

The ancients believed a census was dangerous for the
community
No one should know exactly how many fighting men
Were living in your village
That information could easily be used against the village
Making them vulnerable to attack
Making them
A target for villages with more fighting men

A census is in fact a head count

And it's interesting that the ancient priests and politicians
Of Israel
Were able to capitalize on the supposed dangers of the
census
By substituting a poll tax for the expiation payment
A poll tax was levied on each person
And it became an important revenue source for the
Building and maintaining the sanctuary

Now for us a census doesn't seem all that scary

Interesting
today the census is a bit controversial

For some people in some communities

The government needs to know
How many men and how many women
live in the household

So

The government needs to know
the sex of each of the members of the household

Well ask some

Are we asking each person to declare their sex at birth
And state that they are biological men and women?

Or are self identifications counted?

Someone self identifies as a male

Even though this person may have been born a female

Or what if the person self identifies as sexless

Or multi sexed

See what I mean?

Don't even get me started on ethnic and racial identifications
Controversial

Here in the Torah

We know men over the age of 20 are counted

And

We all know why only men age 20 and higher are counted

That's military age

At age 20 you could serve in the armed forces

You are required to serve and protect your people

From the age of 20

That's Torah

In Israel today military service is mandatory

For most

There are exemptions from joining the IDF

The Israeli Defense Force

Mostly religious exemptions

Or ethnic exemptions

But today most

Israeli men and women over the age of 18

are required to serve 24-32 months

in the military

But why is age 20 specifically mentioned in Torah

Why is 20 the age of majority?

For a few reasons say the rabbis

First of all

Religious reasons

Some sages say that religion is first and foremost for adults

Not primarily for children

Of course religion has much to offer children

But only adults can appreciate its depth and beauty

And truly practice their religion

And these adults provide the models for the children

If Kids see their parents

and the older members of the community

Taking faith seriously

Chances are they will become adults who do the same

They will

Find the depth and beauty of their religion

Good to know

Another interesting reason for making note of the number 20
As an age designation for more responsibility
Is that in the texts of Exodus
20 is the division of the generation who left Egypt
And would die in the desert
As opposed to the second generation
Who would be allowed to enter the promised land
And
don't forget
the promised land, Canaan
Was filled With Canaanites
So the Israelites needed soldiers to clear them out

But no matter what
Almost nobody liked a census because
It almost always came before a war
Or a new tax people had to pay

Like the poll tax
So what is a poll tax?
It is a one time imposition
To pay for a special building project
Like the tabernacle
A new special tax
That you have to pay
just for a little while
Just until the job is done
Very funny right?
Have you ever heard about a new tax being eliminated?
No

A new tax is never removed
It just becomes an old tax that we're still paying

What do you suppose God means when he calls the payment
Here in the text
A ransom?

When we think of ransom we probably think
Money paid to redeem or get someone back
Someone who had been kidnapped
and is being held hostage
Until payment is received for release

Well it's sort of the same idea here
A bit different maybe
Here the money paid as a ransom refers to money
Paid to off set a physical penalty

So each person is paying a ransom for himself or herself
A sort of just in case payment
Life is a gift
And we all owe God just for being alive
And the payment
the ransom helps us remember
We can never take that life for granted

Some rabbis say the ransom money is really some kind of
Prepaid assurance payment
made just as one is going into battle
So the money is like an anticipatory atonement
Paid for the prospect of shedding blood
In battle

The amount of the money that needs to be paid
Is seen as spiritual by some sages

Notice the amount quoted here is one half shekel
Not a whole shekel
There's a lesson there
There's always a lesson in Torah

Torah teaches that a person alone is not whole
A person can only become a complete whole
By joining with others
I like that

Also say the sages
The amount of one half shekel should remind
the male soldiers
That the women and the children
Who would not be going into battle with them
Were still one half of the community

So how can this teaching relate to us today?
Well
Torah teaches that even though there is no temple now
To maintain
And even though there are no high priests now
To pay
We should still show our gratitude
For being alive
By giving
Not to the Temple
Not to the priests

Rather to the poor
I like that too

I also like the concept of
There is one price for all
What did you think of that?
The rich and the poor pay the same amount
to maintain their temple their sanctuary
Does that make sense?
Yes

Torah teaches that the sanctuary belongs to all
equally
To every Israelite
No matter their social status or financial worth
No matter how many children you have
How much money you have
No matter where you live
Everyone pays the same

Torah teaches that
Just as all human beings are equal before God
There is to be one standard equal contribution
For all
That will neither be exceeded or reduced

Some leaders of modern faith communities enforce
This kind of congregational giving
Here's what I mean
If a well to do congregant wants to donate more money
To the church or synagogue or mosque
Make a big charitable contribution

The faith leaders insist
That the donor remain anonymous

This policy tries to assure that those
In your church or synagogue or mosque
who have more money
Do not have more power
So they do not have the opportunity to behave badly
And get a pass
And
That happens doesn't it?
And
It can get you hot under the collar
Maybe even make your blood boil
Puts a fire in your belly

Well listen to this
The rabbis say
When God said the words
This is what each of you shall pay
At the same time he was saying those words
Right then God showed Moses a flame
In the shape of a half a shekel

Why a flame you ask?
Well
Torah teaches that money is like fire
It can provide warmth and comfort
Or it can consume and destroy
A community of faith
Sounds sadly very modern
Here's one more midrash about the half shekel payment

Some say the amount to be paid one half shekel
Is in our text here because of Joseph
Remember
Joseph's brothers sold him to slave traders for
20 dinars
Which is 5 shekels
10 brothers sold him
He had 11 brothers but his baby brother Benjamin
He wasn't in on the dastardly deed
So 10 brothers sell Joseph for 20 dinars, 5 shekels
So
Each brother received
One half shekel
For Joseph's life
Interesting

But here's the bottom line for the Israelites at Sinai
And for all of us in our communities of faith
I believe that
God wants to make sure that we know
Everyone matters
Everyone counts
Or no one counts
No one is worth more than anyone else
Good to remember

But now back to our text
Just as quickly as we shifted away from the incense altar
At the tabernacle
To the census
Now we just as quickly we switch back to the tabernacle
To the tub

And the scented bath oils
But this is not really a description of a tub
Now
It's more like a foot and hand washing station

God says to Moses
Make a laver of copper
And place it on a copper stand
They probably mean bronze not copper
So a big bronze laver
This is for washing
God continues
place the laver between
The tent and the altar
And fill it with water
And let Aaron and his sons
Wash their hands and their feet
With water drawn from the laver
They shall wash so they don't die
Sounds serious

They have to wash
Before they offer sacrifices
And they have to do this forever
Throughout the ages

So no more full immersion bathing
Like we read about last week
This is just hands and feet
Washed in the water from the laver

We will learn the tradition that this laver

Was made from the mirrors of the women
Who served at the tabernacle entrance
But that's for later

Now let's look at this ritual
Hand and feet washing
This custom has survived
For us today

Today Jews wash their hands a lot
Since COVID we all do
Well Torah says you must wash
Before eating a meal with bread
Before praying
Before and after using the toilet

Do Jews wash their feet too ?
They used to
Probably everyone did back then

All people in the ancient Near East wore sandals
Feet got hot and Sandy
So before coming to the table
Or getting into bed the feet were cleansed
Of sand and grime

Interesting ladies
Listen to this
The tradition was that the wife performed these washings
On and For her husband
It was one of her duties
To wash her husband's feet

Now

In my faith tradition pastors wash their hands
At the altar symbolically
They also wash feet or get their feet washed
once a year symbolically
On Maundy Thursday

Muslims also practice ablution
With water
More often than most I think

Muslims wash before they pray
And Muslims pray
5 times a day
And it's a very comprehensive washing

Muslims wash
Hands and then
mouth
Rinse your mouth
Three times
Fill it water swirl it around
And then spit it out

And your nose you wash that too
The inside of your nose
That's right
You inhale the water into your nostrils

Then you wash your face
And then
your arms up to your elbows

And then
You wipe your hair with your wet hands
And then you wash your ears
Inside your ears
That's right
You stick your wet fingers in your ears
And twirl them around
And then the final washing is your feet
And
You have to be sure that
You wash between your toes
So you stick your wet fingers between each toe
And twirl them around

And
All these activities are done 3 times
And
Only after you have washed all these body parts
3 times
Only then are you are ready to pray
And you pray 5 times a day
That's a lot of washing
And a lot of praying

In areas of the United States
where there is a large Muslim population
Wudu sinks have been installed to accommodate this ritual
Have any of you ever seen a wudu sink?

They are so cool
And expensive

These special sinks can cost up to 25 thousand dollars
They are installed in some public and private facilities
Here in the USA
Like airports and on university campuses
There are wudu sinks in the airport in Kansas City
I saw them

You can google it and see
Really cool sinks that allow the faithful to perform the ablution
Away from home
Without having to stick their feet in public sinks
Or wash in a parking lot
Or a public park

We will likely see more wudu sinks
It's a small world
And we're getting smaller
So our public toilets will probably get bigger
To accommodate special sinks
Toilet talk has already begun

How interesting the big buzz in Florida
These days
The big controversy
Is all about going to the toilet that matches
Your birth gender
That way Jimmy and John stay out of the
Ladies' john
Why is that so darn controversial

Just so you I know
Florida is not the only state with that regulation

There are 8 other states that now prohibit
Men walking into the ladies room with your
8 year old daughter
Or with your 88 year old mom
Why is that so controversial?

Now back to our text
God tells Moses to tell the people
To get spices
And God gives a whole list of his favorites
Starting with myhrr
Which comes all the way from Arabia
Somaliland and India and China

God also likes the smell of cinnamon
Who doesn't love that smell?
And cassia
Which comes from the inner bark of the cinnamon tree

And these are to be mixed with olive oil
To make sacred anointing oil
And God insists the oil has to be expertly blended
And there has to be a lot of it
At least a hin of it
More than 7 pints

The Israelites will need at least this much oil
Because everything has to be anointed with the oil
The heads of the priests
And the tent and the ark of course
And the table and it's utensils
And the altars and the fittings

Everything has to be consecrated
Made holy for God

And the people are warned
Don't even think about using any of this special oil
On just any lay person or just any old thing
God is serious about this
Anyone who does that
Will be cut off from their kin

And don't try to duplicate the sacred oil
Don't ever misuse it
Follow the instructions precisely
Or you will be cut off from your kin

We don't know exactly what God meant when he said that
Probably exile or shunning by force
You would be driven out the community
We think
We simply do not have
detailed descriptions of this punishment

But now we're back in the text
With herbs
God makes a list of his favorite herbs
Some of which are unknown to us
But some we know
One is listed as
Stacte
We know this is a sweet spice
Similar to myrrh

The resin of balsam or persimmon
I never heard of it

The next herb God lists is
Onycha
We think it may be derived from mollusks
Onycha is probably not an herb
And I can't imagine boiled shellfish water
Smelling good

The next one is an herb
And it's called galbanum
Comes from Turkey and Persia, and Crete
It is a gum resin that was used by the ancients
For medical practices
And get this
It stinks
Literally
It has a very unpleasant odor

So why in God's holy name
Does God want this herb in his holy oil?

Well say the rabbis it is there to teach us
That galbanum only stinks when it is smelled alone
When it is blended with other aromatic herbs
It has the power to make those herbs smell better

So does Torah teach that your job
Is to make your stinky friends smell better?
Or perhaps we all have to remember that
Torah teaches

Even stinky disagreeable people
Have to be included in our community
I like that

Well God wants all these herbs blended with
Frankincense
Which comes from Arabia or north Somaliland
And when this is all mixed together
By an expert blender
And beaten into a powder
It will be refined pure and sacred incense
For God only
No one else can use it for anything else
It shall be sacred to the Lord

And if this rule is violated
You know what happens
You're cut off from your kin

So this stuff is not for personal use
It's for priests and the tabernacle and the paraphernalia only

Get it?
Got it?
Good says God

And that's the end of Chapter 30
Sort of a mixed bag
Of cleaning instructions
That includes fragrances
God wants everything to smell lovely

And God wants everyone counted so
A census is ordered
So everyone can pay one half a shekel
To make all this happen
and keep happening
As God has commanded it to be

I find it fascinating that so much of this
These ancient texts still have meaning for us today

We are still trying to get clean enough to face God
We are still trying to smell good
Or at least better than others
And we're still trying to pay for it
All that incense
Has anyone attended a worship service
Where incense was a part of the service?

In some faith traditions incense
Is still is a major part of the liturgy
Some call this kind of worship community
A High Church
A church full of smells and bells

The bells are rung at certain times during the service
These are small hand bells
That signal an important statement has just been made
Or is about to be made
The bells tell you
Pay attention
In the Christian community
This usually happens with the Words of institution

Body of Christ (bells ring)
Blood of Christ (bells ring)
Now
Not all Christian liturgy includes bells
But some do
And for these communities
It's an option not an obligation
Some consider it old fashioned

Same with incense
That is burned and dispensed during the service
The priest has this device in his hand
or it can be hung from the ceiling
It's called a thurible
Like a cup with holes in it
On a chain
And inside the cup is the fragrant smelly incense
And the priest gently swings it around
Filling the sanctuary with smelly smoke

You either love it or hate it
Still being done today
So why was it done then
And why are we still doing it?

Well
We talked about masking bad odors
But incense was probably also used back in the day
For prophylactic purposes
A kind of magic
It was believed that the smoke had special powers
That could ward off evil spirits

Get rid of bad karma
Maybe that's why incense enjoyed
A revival during the 1960s
With the hippies
I'm not sure if that's why some students
Would burn incense in their dorm rooms

Maybe it served a more practical purpose
The incense covered up the smell of other
Burning leaves
That were burning illegally
Who knows

But here in our text
We can assume that incense was used
for purification purposes
To make the very air that we breathe pure
And Holy
Like God
And God likes it
And that's probably why incense is still used today
And why some congregations
still consider it an important rite

The priest or the deacon can wave the thurible around
Or sometimes the thurible is a giant cup-like vessel
Suspended on chains from the ceiling
And the priests move the thurible chains
which fills the structure
With the smoke and the smell of incense
Why?
Lots of reasons

It's tradition
God likes it
It makes the place smell really good
Or maybe it's more than that

Just think
Incense makes the olfactory sense
Your nose
part of the relationship
Between the human and the divine
The nose knows holy

We can smell holy a mile away
Say some

But it is a scientific fact that the strongest sense we possess
When it comes to memory
When it comes to remembering our past experiences
Is the sense of smell

Just think about it
You get on a bus
You smell someone's perfume which just happens to be
The same perfume your grandmother wore
And your mind immediately fills with memories
Of Nana
And we don't even think about it
The memories just come
Flooding through the past into our present
We don't think about it
It just happens
And

We can smell danger
That's what has allowed us to survive
We can't explain it
We can't describe the smell
We just know it's a signal
Something is not right

I think that smells most often invoke happy memories
Every Thanksgiving when the Turkey is in the oven
We remember every Thanksgiving
The smell of the Turkey does that

And gingerbread
And any kind of bread baking
There are
So many images stored in our brains
And they are easily triggered to appear again out of our past
By a smell

Today
Smelling is only part
of one Jewish ritual
Done weekly by observant Jews around the world
This ritual has survived the millennia

There is the custom performed at the sabbath dinner table
Once a week after eating and prayers
Just before the sabbath is about to end
And the people are about to go back to the worldly week

A spice box is passed around the table
Everyone takes a whiff of the spice box

Just a smell of those sweet spices
So that they will remember the sweet smell of Shabbat
As they prepare to go back to the real world of work and life

Some rabbis and some church fathers teach that the incense
that is used during services
Back then and now
Is used to hide the presence of God
To keep God in a cloud of mystery

And there is plenty of mystery surrounding incense
Incense is used in all 3 of the major monotheistic religions
Judaism Christianity and Islam
The use of incense in the mosque is allowed
Even encouraged in some cases
It is said that
It perfumes the air and uplifts the souls of the worshippers
Nice

But smelling good is not for everyone
It's ok to let holy places smell good
But not all Muslims think
Muslim women should smell good
At least
Not in public

That's why there are fragrance free soaps
and laundry detergents mandated

And forget about perfume
At least wearing it outside the home
It can be tempting to those who smell it

No doubt the power of smell
Very powerful

And expensive
these concoctions mentioned here
In our text are very costly
The ingredients come from far away places
And they need to be expertly prepared
And blended properly
And this costs money

We've heard the expression
She smells rich
I'm not exactly sure what that means
but maybe it has
Something to do with the cost of smells

For example
.25 fluid ounces of the perfume Chanel Number 5
Sells for \$140
That's a bargain
Do you know the perfume Joy?
You can buy it on Amazon
1/2 ounce for \$600
Believe me these are bargains

Listen to this
The most expensive perfume ever
Out of Dubai
Of course it is
Shumukh by Nabeel
I'm not even sure how to pronounce it

I've never heard of it
But
One bottle of Shumukh by Nabeel
sells for \$1.5 million
Seriously
It's a unisex fragrance
Of course it is

So what does it smell like?
I didn't smell it of course
It's not like there are people walking around Bealls
Misting all the people with this stuff
But I looked it up
I read about it
Know what it smells like?

Sandalwood and musk
Seriously
That's a lot of shekels for smelling like sandalwood
And we know what musk is
Right?
Musk is
Secretions from a particular gland of a particular animal
1.5 million dollars to smell like an animal's gland secretions
Crazy

Well in our parsha today
We read that
All the ingredients making
The Incenses and oils
They Are all made from all natural ingredients
That's in our parsha

But what about today?

Is this still true?

No it is not

Most of the smells that we buy today

come from a lab

Not from nature

They are chemically created

by scientists not artisans

Now

there are other scientists who claim

that these chemically created fragrances

are actually playing havoc with

The chemicals that are naturally produced in our bodies

these fake fragrances

are called EDCs

Endocrine-disrupting chemicals

As if we didn't have enough to worry about

Now you have to be concerned that the fabric softener

You have been using

You use it

Because you love the smell of it

is actually creating hormonal disequilibrium in your body

Just great

Right?

Hormonal havoc

Scientists in Denmark have studied this

Extensively

I don't want to make you crazy
You can research it yourself
the scholarly scientific conclusion
Is
natural is better than synthetic
Frankincense
Myrrh
Cinnamon
Much better for you

No big surprises here
Right?
God told us this over 4,000 years ago
So
Instead of plugging in that Glade air freshener
Or spraying all that Fabreeze around your place
Find your smells in nature
It's better for you
And it's cheaper
You'll spend less and be healthier
God said so

But what about the money
That's discussed in our parsha today
Shekels
And half shekels

Shekels were actually weights
The word shekel means to weigh
Back in the day shekels we're made of stones
That had a particular weight

Later on the weights were made of metal
And still later the metal weights became
Coins

There are at least 7 different weights described in the Bible
The Shekel is just one

But I'm curious to know how you feel
about the idea that the rich and the poor
Pay the same amount of shekels?

I can hear some of you saying
That's not fair
Where's the justice in that?
Poor people who have so much less than rich people
Have to pay the same as rich people who have so much
more than poor people
Not fair
But
back then
And now
Reality is
Poor people have a hard time paying anything
So
Many poor people don't pay
They just didn't have it to pay
That's real life

So then how do we explain God's order
That all should pay the same amount?
Well
Some rabbis translate that phrase this way
The rich shall not have to legally pay more than the poor

But morally
they should be generous
And the poor should pay whatever they can afford
No matter what that is or it isn't

Some scholars explain
That this text describes the Israelites in the desert
A non urbanized society
There are No cities
And no established economic structure
So the extremes of great wealth
And abject poverty
Have not yet become reality

We evolved into that reality
And please God we are all working
To get us out of that reality

And that is chapter 30
When you read this chapter last week
Did you think there was this much in it?
And trust me
We have only scratched the surface
We have left a lot for the next time we come to this text

For those of you who are new to our mishpaha
Our family
We have been doing this together
for 2 years and 6 months
This is our second trip through the Torah
The first 5 books of the Old Testament
The Hebrew Bible

But
This time around
The 3rd time
we have decided to keep traveling
Out of Torah
And into Joshua and Judges and all the way through
The Old Testament
And straight into the New Testament
To revelation

It's a plan
And please God
We will do it together
Book by book
Parsha by parsha

Next week we will read chapter 31
We will meet 2 interesting talented people
Who are in charge of a whole crew of very
Interesting and talented people
Craft people artisans of all kinds
And then we will stop in chapter 31
For a rest
A sabbath
A shabbat
A shabbos
Yes once again God tells Moses to tell us
About the sabbath
And we'll talk about the sabbath
And the theology of work
Next week
Now

Peter and Aiden and I hope you don't work too hard
This week
Leave plenty of time for yourself
And for family and friends
And of course for Torah
Kol Tov
Shalom