

“Calm”
Exodus 32:1-14
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
Sermon #74
20th Sunday After Pentecost
32nd Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic
10.18.20

Exodus 32:1-14 CEB

32 The people saw that Moses was taking a long time to come down from the mountain. They gathered around Aaron and said to him, “Come on! Make us gods who can lead us. As for this man Moses who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we don’t have a clue what has happened to him.”

2 Aaron said to them, “All right, take out the gold rings from the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” **3** So all the people took out the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. **4** He collected them and tied them up in a cloth. Then he made a metal image of a bull calf, and the people

declared, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"

5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf. Then Aaron announced, "Tomorrow will be a festival to the Lord!" **6** They got up early the next day and offered up entirely burned offerings and brought well-being sacrifices. The people sat down to eat and drink and then got up to celebrate.

7 The Lord spoke to Moses: "Hurry up and go down! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, are ruining everything!" **8** They've already abandoned the path that I commanded. They have made a metal bull calf for themselves. They've bowed down to it and offered sacrifices to it and declared, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" **9** The Lord said to Moses, "I've been watching these people,

and I've seen how stubborn they are. **10** Now leave me alone! Let my fury burn and devour them. Then I'll make a great nation out of you."

11 But Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, "Lord, why does your fury burn against your own people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and amazing force? **12** Why should the Egyptians say, 'He had an evil plan to take the people out and kill them in the mountains and so wipe them off the earth'? Calm down your fierce anger. Change your mind about doing terrible things to your own people. **13** Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, whom you yourself promised, 'I'll make your descendants as many as the stars in the sky. And I've promised to give your descendants this whole land to possess for all time.'" **14** Then the Lord changed his mind about the terrible things he said he would do to his people.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Well, I hate to tell you I told you so, but.....I told you so!

After those marvelous acts the LORD did for our ancestors in Egypt, they forgot! After delivering the Hebrews out of Egypt to the sea, they were ready to go back to slavery! After bringing them from the sea to safety in the wilderness, the children complained about food

and water and were ready to go back to the good ole days! After giving them a set of boundaries to follow to create a healthy community between God and the Israelites, the Israelites and creation, and the Israelites with one another, they wonder where Moses is and Aaron gives into temptation to make a golden statue!

Frankly, I don't blame God for this anger. The LORD who rose up brave women to defy the "law and order" of pharaoh is the same one who protected Moses from birth until this moment is also the same LORD who heard the cries of the children under pharaoh's oppressive hand and remembered the covenant made all those years ago with an elderly barren couple: Abraham and Sarah.

Moses, God's chosen leader of the Hebrews, has been summoned to the mountain to talk with God for 40 days. The Hebrews are restless, impatient, and suffering from corporate amnesia.

"Come on! Make us gods who can lead us.

As for this man Moses who brought us up out of the land of Egypt,

we don't have a clue what has happened to him."

It's subtle, but the people have forgotten Moses wasn't the one who delivered the enslaved people from Egypt. It was the LORD God Almighty! It was also the LORD who summoned Moses to be on the mountain for over a month!

God's chosen band of people fooled themselves into thinking Moses alone had led them out. Our spiritual ancestors fooled themselves into thinking that they and they alone could safely head to the Promised Land on their own.

Aaron, Moses' top lieutenant, is a coward. He commands the people to give of their jewelry and make it into a golden image. Everyone is complicit. Like a bunch of cultists, they drink the Koolaid that does nothing except bring heartache and destruction to their lives. They believe the lie that Moses alone led them out of Egypt. They believe the lie that because Moses is gone, they are without help. They believe the lie that because God is not directly speaking to them at that moment that God has abandoned them. They believe the lie that if they venture to the Promised Land on

their own terms, they and they alone will conquer the land. They believe the lie that the LORD God is not the God who brought them out of slavery, the god they make from their own image will help them.

It has been around 12 chapters since the LORD gave the people the 10 Commandments and already, these people are disobedient.

Typical fickle human nature.

I don't blame God for being angry. The evidence of Israel's unfaithfulness is there and God is ready to start anew with Moses and only Moses.

But, I love what happens in the midst of the chaos. Even after God accuses Moses in verses 7-10 that he was the lone instrument of leading the people whom God calls “your people” as in Moses’ people, Moses sets an example that is demonstrated throughout the Bible, history, and our lives. Moses intercedes on behalf of a broken people. Moses reminds God of the covenant that was made all those years ago with Abraham and Sara. Moses tells God in verses 11-12:

“LORD, why does your fury burn against your own people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and amazing force? Why should the Egyptians say ‘He had an evil plan to take the people out and kill them in the mountains and so wipe them off the earth’?

Like the cries God heard in Exodus 2:23-25, God remembered the covenant. And God is reminded here by Moses of the covenant. Moses reminds God of God's reasonableness, reputation, and promise¹. Reasonableness: "LORD, you JUST brought these people out! Don't act so quickly!" Reputation: "What will others say, LORD?!? Don't you want others to know your name and praise you?" Promise: "Lord, you promised to multiply these people, not destroy them!"

If God has to be reminded by Moses, a faithful servant, of the promise made all those years ago, then we, too, need that reminder.

¹ Terrence E. Fretheim. *Exodus*. John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, pp. 285-6.

God wasn't about to sin because God was rightfully angered by the actions of the Israelites. God did, however, turn from this decision to destroy the chosen people. Why did God turn from that decision? Because God is gracious, and merciful, and abounds in faithful love.

Today's passage is not about doing what you want and expect to be forgiven. Today's passage isn't about a vengeful God who needs to be appeased. Today's passage is not about asking for forgiveness and not being held accountable. Forgiveness without accountability, according to my Pastoral Care Professor, the Rev. Dr. Carol Schweitzer, is cheap grace. Our spiritual ancestors made a poor decision and they will have to deal with it. And Moses does just that. He grinds the golden calf, scattered it on water, and

forces the Israelites to drink it in Exodus 32:20. The people were given the Law and they broke it. They made their bed with the golden calf, now they have to sleep in it.

Yet, in all of the need for reminding, in the heat of anger, in the chaos, God never abandons the people. God continues to lead this dysfunctional, but beloved band of people. And Moses continues his role as mediator between God and the people.

These verses today remind us that in the midst of the chaos around us when we hear the demands of the people to make our own gods out of our own image, we can rest assured that we haven't been abandoned. While God's timeline and ours don't line up, God is up to something. God is good on God's promises and God holds us

accountable to live as God's beloved children in a world full of turmoil. Praise God, we have a Mediator. One who is even better than Moses. Jesus Christ, the fulfiller of the Law and the Prophets who showed us how to live our lives reflecting the love of God, neighbor, and self. By the Holy Spirit's power, when the forces of evil tempt us to make our own gods, we can be reminded of the covenant God made with our ancestors long ago and continue to live lives reflecting our loving God.

Siblings in Christ, believe this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.