

Our Mission:

To share Christ with the world
and grow disciples for Jesus



Loving God and Loving Neighbor as Ourselves

Background:

This story is very familiar to most of us, but nonetheless problematic. Why and how would Israel so quickly forget all God had done for them? Why would they choose to craft an image of a calf that corresponds with the false idols of their neighbors? Why is God so fickle, first rescuing them then wanting to destroy them? It is important to remember that this is not an extemporaneous account of the Exodus but is a historical remembrance. Is the purpose to warn contemporary Israel of its fickleness? Is this a cautionary tale alerting Israel to the reality that while God has chosen them, their choices have consequences? Or maybe it is simply a commentary on the state of the human heart and God's enduring patience?

Theology Connection:

We know that the first command is a prohibition of idol worship. As Luther would remind us, an idol is that which we trust with our life, and yet fails to deliver. Idol worship is alive and well today just as it was so long ago. We have the ability to turn almost everything, including faith into idol worship. Think about it, is it our belief that our relationship with God is dependent upon having the right of sufficient faith or is it simply a matter of God's grace? Faith or trust, therefore, is taking action, trusting in God's choice for us.

Application:

In the book of James, we are told that faith without works is not really faith. That is because in the ancient world, faith was not simply a cognitive choice but a willingness to act in accord with one's understanding. If we truly put our trust in God (and correspondingly God's goodness) and not in the idols of this world, what would faith look like? How would our understanding of God shape our actions as well as our choices?

The Text: Exodus – Exodus 32: 1-14

32 When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

² Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." ³ So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods,¹ Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord." ⁶ So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

⁷ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. ⁸ They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

⁹ "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people.¹⁰ Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

¹¹ But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?"

¹² Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.

¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'"

¹⁴ Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

ADULT

We might find it silly that the Israelites so quickly return to the gods of Egypt. How child-like to create a talisman you hope will bring you good luck. Yet do we find ourselves attempting to secure good fortune through our prayers or piety? What is the purpose of prayer (and worship) for you?

As parents it might be a relief for us to see God lose his patience with the children of Israel. It's not as if that has never happened to us. Nonetheless, it is a bit problematic that Moses has to convince God not to release his wrath for fear of what the neighbors might say! There are many who would argue that the God of the Old Testament is vastly different from the Jesus of the New Testament. Yet Scripture doesn't support such a view. How do you hold this account in tension with the words of Jesus from the cross, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?'

YOUTH

Please read Exodus 32:1-14

The story is simple enough: Middle class parents go out of town for an overnight trip—leaving their mild-mannered teenage child home alone for the weekend. As the parents leave the house, they turn around and say, “Take care of things this weekend and no parties!” Of course, a house party is thrown, and things get terribly out of control. Chaos ensues and the house is turned into a disaster area. The child tries to cover-up evidence of the party, but it is too late. The parents return and everything is discovered. The Israelites seem a lot like these teenagers. Set free from the control of their Egyptian slave masters and in the absence of Moses’ godly authority and leadership, they lose all control, indulging in sin and betraying God. It is a slippery slope from slavery to complete moral abandon. God desires us to grow up and mature, to develop the internal discipline of self-control that can keep our faith on track even when other authority figures are unavailable or irresponsible.

Let us pray:

Dear God,

The people of Israel doubted your power and turned to other gods to fulfill their needs. We too, turn to other gods, seeking acceptance, power, and independence. Show us how to live humbly in you and walk in your ways. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen!

CHILDREN’S

Moses, who bravely led the Israelites out of Egypt, seems to have disappeared. He went up a mountain and didn’t return. The Israelite people grew restless in his long absence. The people wanted something to worship, so they put all their gold together, and melted it to create a golden calf statue! God says that it is a terrible sin to worship anything besides Him. God was angry! So, Moses came down from the mountain and taught the people that what they were doing was very wrong.

Think:

1. Have you ever felt alone? How did you respond to that situation?
2. How does God help us when we feel alone?
3. What can we do to grow our relationship with God?

Remember:

Just like the Israelites, we all sin and make mistakes sometimes. The most important thing we can do when we make mistakes, is to ask for forgiveness. We need to tell God exactly what is going on and ask Him to lead us in the direction that we should be going.

Pray:

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for teaching us how to live a life that pleases You. We know that we make mistakes sometimes, so please help us to remember to ask for forgiveness. Please keep us all safe, happy, and healthy!

In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen!