

# ***The Lord Relented***

Exodus 32:1-14  
October 22, 2017

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

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

Talk about grace.

We have been looking at some passages in Exodus the past few weeks. A couple of weeks ago we considered that passage where God gave Moses the law...the Ten Commandments. The first commandment is, "You shall have no other gods before me." The second commandment is, "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them...." In our text for today we see God's people pretty much obliterating both of those commands.

I also said a few weeks ago, when we talked about how God's people did a lot of complaining, that I had always been kind of hard on the people...and how I was going to do some repenting because I can see me doing the same thing. Well...I can just about understand why God's people made that golden calf. Now don't get me wrong here. It was sin. No doubt about that. But I think I can see where they were coming from.

How does our text begin? The people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain. So long in coming down.... Moses had been up there a long time. So they said to Aaron, "Come, make us gods (or a god) 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." So they were basically sitting around wondering what was going on. Moses had been gone awhile. So they wanted a god among them. More on this in a bit.

Now I am going to jump to the New Testament for just a moment. John, chapter

fourteen. Jesus was in the upper room with his disciples. He had just told them he was going away. This created no shortage of angst among the apostles. Jesus said he was leaving. How do you think they felt about that? But he assured them he would be back.

Okay. So Jesus said he was going away. He said he was coming back. So there is this whole stretch of time in between the going away and the coming back. How much time? We are still waiting for Jesus to come back.

But what else did Jesus say? He said—he promised—that he would send a counselor, a comforter, a helper, the Holy Spirit. The Greek word is *paraclete*...one called alongside to help. And the Holy Spirit would be with us while he was gone.

Here's the deal on this. We who follow Jesus...we believe that God is present with us. God is among us. Amen? In the person and presence of the Holy Spirit, God is with us. We need to know and believe this. If we did not believe this, wouldn't there be a little bit of angst and fear among us?

Back to Exodus and our text. The people simply wanted to know that God was among them. They struggled with that. Remember, that was how they tested God. Exodus, chapter seventeen and verse seven, "...they tested the Lord saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not.'" They were even confused as to just who it was that delivered them...who was leading them. There were those times when they almost accused Moses of bringing them out of Egypt.

The book of Exodus begins with the people oppressed and in bondage. They cried out to God. Their cries went up to God. Up to God. God was up...way up. The book ends in chapter forty

with the completion of the tabernacle and God coming down and filling the tabernacle and God going before the people as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. So God went from being way up to being among the people. But there was all this time in between...and the people wondered if God was among them...or if God and Moses had their own thing going that did not include them.

I think I get it...just a bit. We would all like to be assured that God is among us and with us...always. Am I right?

You know, not to get too far afield here, but there are a whole lot of folks who truly believe God created the heavens and the earth. And then God just sort of left us to fend for ourselves. God is way up there. We are way down here trying to work things out. This is known as deism. A deist believes in a supreme creator being, God. But they also believe God does not intervene in human affairs. Some of the founding fathers and mothers of this great country were deists.

Now we would say that is a bunch of hokey. I hope we would say that. But I contend that many followers of Jesus sometimes act as if God is way up there...just not concerned with what goes on here...certainly not intervening with what goes on here. Where was God when...? Why doesn't God stop all this from happening? People ask these specific questions and a whole lot more like it. I have allowed myself moments of doubt when I have asked the same questions...or have wondered.

The disciples were in a boat. A storm came up. It was a big one. They were scared. Jesus was asleep. They woke Jesus and asked him if he even cared that they might drown. Let me just say: don't ask or wonder if God cares.

The people of God in our text were in the wilderness. God was up on this mountain. Moses was with God. They wondered if God cared about them. They desired to have God right there with them. So they made this false god...a god they could see and feel and touch...a god right among them. I get it. When people begin to doubt the presence of God among them...well, those

people fall into the temptation of making gods of other things.

We must remain assured that God is with us. God does care. God does intervene. I could quote so many Scripture passages on this. One will suffice. My favorite on this issue. The one hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm. And this is strictly my paraphrase. "Where can I be, O God, where you are not? When times are good, you are there. When times are hellish—even for a long time—you are there. Nothing can keep me hidden from you." There is no need for us to chase after other gods. The Lord God is always with us. The promise Jesus made to his disciples is still good.

One final point here. We see in this text the awesome power of intercession.

The golden calf was made and worshipped. And did God ever get mad. We are talking really mad. His anger burned. He asked Moses to leave him alone so that his anger could burn. Have you ever been mad at someone...so mad...and you wanted to be mad for a while? Some third party tries to reason with you. And you don't want to be talked out of your anger just yet. You want to stew and burn and be mad for just a little bit...like that feels good or something. God said to Moses, "Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them...." God wanted to destroy them and make Moses into a great nation.

Well, that would not have looked good. It's all right here in the text. Let's not sugarcoat it. Moses intervened. Moses reminded God that it might not look good if he destroyed his people. Folks might think he went back on a promise and a covenant he entered into with Abraham to make Abraham a great nation.

And it says right here in verse fourteen in our text, "Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened." The New International Version from which we read softens this a bit. The Hebrew word translated "relented" is the same word that is translated as "repented" in almost every other place in the Old Testament. Now someone will

say, "Hold on just a minute here. No need for God to ever repent."

Well, I have said it more than a few times. To repent is not to be sorry for sin or sorry for anything. To be sorry is to be sorry. Repent simply means to change...to change a course of action...to change the way we live...to change our mind.

God was angry. God thought about destroying the folks. "Destroy" is the word used in the text. Then God relented. God changed his mind. Why did God change his mind? Moses interceded. Moses interceded for a sinning people...for a people who would not have thought to seek the forgiveness of God. Moses said, "O Lord...turn from your fierce anger; relent (change your mind) and do not bring disaster on your people."

There is no need to worship a god of our making. It is a sin to do that. The Lord God is always among us in the person and presence of the Holy Spirit. Our God cares and always acts on our behalf. And we always must pray. Always intercede for others. We read in the book of James, "The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective."

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