**November 8, 2020 Exodus 32:1-14**

***Oh, The Wait***

**Scripture:** Exodus 32:1-14 NRSV

*(1)When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." (2)Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." (3)So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. (4)He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" (5)When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD." (6)They rose early the next day, and offered burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel. (7)The LORD said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; (8)they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" (9)The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. (10)Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation." (11)But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with 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 consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. (13)Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" (14)And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.*

**Notes:**

1. This has been quite a ***journey*** for the Hebrews.
   1. ***Deliverance***, Direction, Hunger, and Thirst.
   2. Will they be ***God’s*** people?
   3. The Israelites agree to a ***covenant*** with God.
2. ***Moses*** has returned up Mount Sinai.
   1. 40 days; the people think Moses will not ***return***.
   2. The Israelites ***confront*** Aaron.
   3. Aaron takes the gold and fashions a golden ***calve***.
3. God sees ***all*** and knows ***all***.
   1. God ***confronts*** Moses.
   2. But Moses ***intervenes***.
   3. God ***changed*** His mind.
4. I have come to some conclusions.
   1. A large part of our faith is ***waiting***, ***waiting*** for God, and ***waiting*** for the time to be right.
   2. God cannot be ***contained***, ***explained***, or ***controlled***.
   3. What we do ***waiting***, impacts our life with God.
5. They were still God’s ***people*** headed to the Promised Land.
   1. God loves you; you are His creation and God doesn’t make ***junk***.
   2. If you will be His ***people***, He will be your ***God***.
   3. It is never a ***waste*** of time or effort to follow the Lord.
   4. ***Waiting*** is our opportunity to worship, pray, and grow.

**Script:**

Oh, the wait, it seems like it will take forever. I have never been good at waiting, I have told you this many times before; waiting to be old enough to play organized baseball, waiting to be able to go hunting, waiting to be a teenager (somehow I thought my life would change when that happened, it didn’t); waiting to turn 16 so I was able to drive; waiting to graduate High School and go to college; waiting to turn 18, that’s right I started college when I was 17; and waiting to find the woman I would love enough to marry and start a family. So many times I would force my will onto the scheme of things and by doing that, by rushing events to take place, I would mess up the plans and dreams that I had. If only I could have learned to wait, to wait on God, to wait on the plans that he has made to come to fruition. But I thought I knew what I was doing.

We all have issues with waiting. All you need to do is get stuck in traffic and then look at the people in the cars next to you; some will be grumbling, some will be talking on the cell phone, and some may even be yelling at the person who caused the delay. But others will wait patiently, Reading a book or singing a song with the radio. When we try to rush things or take matters into our own hands, we have a tendency to mess up our plans and dreams as well as others.

Today as we continue following the Hebrews on their exodus. We find them being impatient and taking matters into their own hands, and in so doing they mess up in memorable fashion. Turn with me to Exodus 32 verses 1-14 and stand with me as we share in the reading of God’s word.

*(1)When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." (2)Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." (3)So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. (4)He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" (5)When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD." (6)They rose early the next day, and offered burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel. (7)The LORD said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; (8)they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" (9)The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. (10)Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation." (11)But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with 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 consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. (13)Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" (14)And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people. Exodus 32:1-14 NRSV*

This has been quite a journey for the Hebrews. They have come a long way from their captivity in Egypt. First they were able to escape Egypt after the plagues devastated Pharaoh and his country. They followed instructions given Moses when told to prepare the Passover meal. And then they made their run for freedom, only to be pursued by Pharaoh until they reached the red sea. Desperate they wondered what to do, and again they followed the instructions given Moses. The waters parted and the Hebrews traveled through on dry ground. After they passed, the Egyptians attempted to do the same, only to be swallowed up by the returning waves, deliverance. The Hand of God is on their side.

Days pass and they finally reach a point where their supplies are running out. Hunger, What will they eat, what will they do? Again God supplies their needs by giving quail to eat at night, and each morning there is manna that they may gather for the day. But they can only gather enough for one day.

Thirst, They continue on until they begin to complain about their lack of water. Again God supplies their need. Moses is instructed to strike the rock in Meribah with his staff and water gushes forth supplying all the water they will need. There are many things we skipped over as we follow the Israelites until last week.

When God gave Moses a list of 10 commandments, Moses shared them with the Hebrews and they were given a choice. Will they be God’s people and follow these commands? Or will they decide to part ways and live on their own means. The Israelites choose to stick with God and they agree to a covenant with Him. Now Moses has returned up Mount Sinai and the people have been left to their own devices. They look to the mountain and there is a glow on the top as if it were on fire; 1 day passes, and they worry, 10 days pass, and they continue to wait for Moses return, then 20 days pass, they worry about Moses safety, it is now 40 days and nights and the people are begin to think that Moses will not return.

So the Israelites confront Aaron. “Come make gods for us, who shall go before us; As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, We do not know what has become of him.” I’m not certain, but have to think Aaron didn’t give in to this crowd as easily as it sounds. He surely didn’t give up on his brother as easily as the others did. But how could he give in and make the gods they ask for? But as you read it, it sounds like this; the people waited but grew restless of that, so they go to Aaron and said “…make us some gods to lead us through this land.” And Aaron says “OK, Give me all of your gold, the gold you have, the gold your wife has, and the gold your children have.”

Aaron takes it all and begins to fashion a golden calve statue. I imagine it looking like a paper mâché art class project. But it only needed to resemble the object it was to look like. At least it had a face and they could recognize it. Aaron must have been proud of himself because catch what he says to them, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” But that wasn’t enough he made an altar in front of it, and then declared “Tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord”

God sees all and knows all, he knows what they are up to, God confronts Moses. “Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt! I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.” God has had enough of these whiny selfish Hebrews, he is ready to wipe them off the face of the earth, or so it seems.

But Moses intervenes, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people.”

“Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'” And just like that God changed His mind the verbiage implies that the Lord repented. But yes God changed his mind. So one crisis is avoided and Moses heads down to take care of another.

This is a troubling story, and conjures up more questions than answers. If God is all-knowing, why did he need Moses to remind him of all of those things? If God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, undisputable as the theologians say, why does it say in Exodus 32:14 that he repented and changed his plans? Was Moses impassioned argument that powerful? Or was God’s whole intent to test Moses; was Moses willing to stand in the gap for these people? A few verses back God declared them to be his people. But in a flash, He no longer lays claim to these heathens and gives Moses ownership. Moses has showed his true character and stood up for these people, even when God is less than pleased with them.

I hope you won’t be too frustrated when I state that I do not know all the answers; These questions are merely posed to give you something to wrestle with; Could the Lord really go to such extremes to save a people, only to get upset with them and wipe them out? Often, I read the Bible, pause, think, wonder, pray, and close it, unsure of the answers to all my questions. This story would be one of those cases for me. But I have come to some conclusions.

First, large part of our faith is waiting, waiting for God, and waiting for the time to be right. What we do while we wait, reveals what kind of faith we have. God’s people had been through a number of disorienting ordeals. But, they have seen the evidence of God’s work like few in history. They knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God was in control, They knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God heard their prayers, and they knew that God loved them. They knew it, but it wasn’t enough.

They wanted to dictate the terms of the relationship. Fed up with waiting, they broke the very first two rules God gave. And if they were trying to force God’s hand, it worked. He did not destroy them as he said he wanted to do. But, he does punish them severely. Many will die. The rest had to eat the golden calf. It was ground into dust and they were forced to consume it.

Many of us have heard of the old, righteous man named Simeon. in Luke 2:25-25, the Holy Spirit told Simeon that he would not die until he saw the Messiah with his own eyes. When Mary and Joseph brought their little boy Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to be blessed, the Spirit nudged old Simeon and said now is the time. He never questioned the salvation of Israel was this child held in his arms. Through tear-filled eyes, he said, “Master now you are dismissing your servant in peace … for my eyes have seen your salvation” (Luke 2:29-30a). After Jesus rose from the grave, and ascended to Heaven, the disciples huddled together in Jerusalem and waited. For 40 days, they waited the same amount time the Israelites waited at the foot of the mountain. However, the disciples didn’t create a golden calf, they prayed. And after 40 days, at Pentecost, they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

A second conclusion is that God cannot be contained, explained, or controlled. God is so very real, dynamic, unpredictable, relational, passionate, and interested in us, each of us. God knows what’s going on in our lives. Just as we are waiting for Him to step in, He’s waiting for us to invite him in. He wants us to turn our attention off of ourselves and focus upon Him.

Compare these two activities that took place in periods of waiting. Those who followed Moses saw more miracles and more spectacle than anyone before or since. It didn’t produce faith. Instead of trusting God they, decided to displace God. God responded with harsh punishment because His love for them was rejected. The disciples in the same period of waiting prayed and worshipped. God responded with a violent rush of wind that filled them with the Holy Spirit and empowered them to share the gospel and establish the first churches in history. God loves us and responds to us. That’s the kind of God He is.

This leads to a third conclusion. What we do, how we spend our waiting time, has an impact on the life we have with God. Those who grow in faith through prayer and worship in times of uncertainty will be filled with the love God. Those who dismiss God and turn away and reject Him are punished. I think most of the time he simply lets us suffer the consequence of his absence and our own mistakes.

What if God had done nothing with the Israelites when they made that calf? Would they have survived on their own? They would have been overrun by Egypt or enslaved by another powerful nomadic tribe who dominated the region. As rough as their discipline seems, when it ended, they were still God’s people, and they were still headed to the Promised Land. As angry as God was, he still loved them.

God loves you, you are His creation and God doesn’t make junk. There will be times in your life when you will find yourself waiting for God. Times when you feel all alone. Times when you do not know which direction to turn. Times when you desire to hear his voice. And Times when you become impatient. In these times, seek the Lord’s will in your life. In prayer, in worship, in the reading of scripture, seek his will as you talk with others regarding your situation. Seek his will as you work for His kingdom.

Understand that the greatest minds of all time are not able to understand, control, or predict the love of God; but know that if you will be His people, He will be your God. And what a mighty God He is. What a mighty God we serve. And finally know that it is never a waste of time or effort to follow the Lord. Many times we are blessed in response to our deeds of service. If we are faithful we will find blessings in the events that are a part of; most likely we don’t notice them when we are busy looking at ourselves.

God loves each and every one of us. Sometimes in our walk, we have to wait upon the Lord. The period of waiting is our opportunity to worship, pray, and grow. When we take that opportunity, we are ready for whatever God has next. Even as we wait, He sees, He loves, and He plans grand things for us. Together, in faith and trust, let us wait upon the Lord.