

“Our Sinful Natures”

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Text: Exodus 32:1-14

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(The Choir finishes an amazing anthem prior to the sermon.) Can't you just hear the Israelite people praising God as they came out of Egypt? With a voice of joy, they were let go from the pharaoh. My thought is that they were praising God as beautifully as that (*pointing to the direction of the choir*) all the way.

Well, that's the beginning of the story. We're picking it up somewhere in the middle in chapter 32 of Exodus. Now, I may have said this before, but I am one of those horrible movie goers. If I don't get in at the beginning of the movie, I turn next to the person beside of me and ask, "What's going on? Now who is that? What did they do before this?" If I am watching a children's movie, like Ratatouille or Shrek, and I don't know any of the characters, I look around to a child and ask, "Who are they and what are they doing?" And I always get this response. "SSSSHHHHHHhhhhhh. Just watch the movie." Well the lectionary text does this to us so frequently that I want to know the whole story. So how many of you have heard the "Golden Calf Story" before? **Don't make idols before God.** We've all heard this part of it, right? We all know what is going on. We all think....we might have some idea. Well I might as well just go home, because all of you know this story. We could eat lunch early. (laughter) Everyone's like ok, yeah and looking at their watch. But **what** I found this week was so interesting. I actually ran into Neil's office (our senior pastor) and told him "I found this really cool thing **and** I want to share it!" But I've got to figure out how to do it in about ten minutes so I need you to go with me.

If you have your bibles, this story of when the people come out of Egypt in Exodus begins several chapters before and we're going to back up a bit. We're going to pay specific attention to chapters 25,26,27,28 and 29. I can do this in ten minutes, I promise. But what you need to know is the problem that **got** us there (to the people creating a Golden Calf) is that Moses went up the mountain to talk to God. Now when Moses went up the mountain, he thought it was going to be a short trip. Kind of like when I go to Home Depot. (*Laughter*) I think I'm going to run in and it's going to be quick. I'm running in to get the part I need to fix the problem and several hours later when I am making my way home, I realize it wasn't so quick. Then once I get home, I open the instructions to what's described as a simple 10-15 minute project that ends up taking me most of the weekend to finish. Moses went up the mountain to talk to God. What he went to talk to God about was the Golden Mishkan. God was telling Moses how to build a place where God would reside. How many of you may remember the Ark of the Covenant? And if you don't remember it biblically, most of you have an idea of it from Indiana Jones, right? So Moses is up on the mountain to speak about a place where God would dwell with his people; a place where God would intimately be connected in the covenant that God was making with them. "**I have brought you out of Egypt. I will make this covenant with you. You will be my people and I will be your God.**" So Moses, who had led them out of Egypt, is the delegate to go up and talk to God, to see what the dwelling place would look like. Now that would be like sending me in the place of Ty Pennington from Extreme Home **M**akeover up to be an Engineer and an Interior Decorator. God's gonna have to take little more time with me, or with Moses, or with any of you because **God** starts **talking** to Moses about what the dwelling place should look like and I assume that as **God** starts talking and Moses says, "Wait a minute. I think I need to write this down!"

Look with me to Chapter 25:1. (reading quickly) "*The LORD said to Moses: ²Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from all whose hearts prompt them to give you shall receive the offering for me. ³This is the offering that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, ⁴blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine linen, goats' hair, ⁵tanned rams' skins, fine leather, acacia wood, ⁶oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, ⁷onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and for the breastpiece.*" (taking a breath) It gets worse from there. Moses' to do list keeps growing and they didn't have paper and pens back then. I don't know how he was remembering this and then the scripture says that God told Moses how to build the Ark of the Covenant. ¹⁰*They shall make an ark of acacia wood; it shall be two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. ¹¹You shall*

overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside you shall overlay it, and you shall make a molding of gold upon it all around.”

Now from what we know of the story, it takes approximately forty days to gather all of these instructions. That’s a long time. If I sat here and just read all of this it would probably take about twenty minutes, but I think we would grow impatient waiting for the point, right? The people of Israel were down the mountain waiting. And they were getting a little impatient. They wanted God to be present with them, they wanted God to be present in their midst and they got tired of waiting. And they could hear the rumblings up the mountain. God’s voice must be so amazing that even up the mountain, they could hear rumblings, echoes coming off the mountain from where God was speaking with Moses. They heard things like **gold**. They heard things like **horns**. They heard things like **bright** and **offerings**. And in their impatient waiting, they said, *“Oh...we’ve got it. We know what that must look like. We don’t need Moses. We don’t know what’s happened to him. We’ve heard God. We can make this all on our own.”* And so they came to Aaron, number two in command and said, *“Let us make an offering before God. Make us something that tells us that God is in our midst.”* What Aaron had seen is that they had been asking for this before, and when they were denied, they murdered them. They wanted God in their midst so badly, they were willing to do anything to make it happen. Now listen to that again, *“**they wanted God in their midst so badly, they were willing to do anything to make it happen.**”* So their patience wore thin. The communication got skewed. They thought they heard what they were actually supposed to do in the echoes, but they didn’t hear all the pieces in the middle.

I think God has a funny sense of humor, because I got an intimate tangible example of this very thing this week. All of you may not know this, but we’ve been having computer problems. Our email comes up. Our email goes down. Our website comes up. Our website goes down. And we call and talk with technical support and for about three seconds it’s fixed. I am saying words of perfect English over the phone *“When you type in our address, it comes up cannot display the page.”* The person on the other end of the phone says *“What address are you typing in?”* And after about thirty minutes of *“I’m typing in www.fccmanhattan.org and hitting enter.”* (The tech support guy) *“Are there any spaces or dashes?”* I reply, *“No. I am typing in www.fccmanhattan.org.”* What was so frustrating for both of us is that we had a language that we were attempting to communicate and it sounded as though we were speaking with **others** in ways that we could **not** understand. I now know things about nanoseconds and dns cache retrieval, and route drives and I know all these things that I never knew before. (laughter in the congregation) But before we could get anything accomplished, we had to actually speak the same language and be patient with one another in ways I never thought I had the patience for. Then, come to find out, even in the midst of all of this conversation, it took someone else to fix the problem. Not because I didn’t know what I was doing, and not because the person on the other end of the phone didn’t know what they were doing, but because someone with an outside knowledge, knew the answer. We finally got on the phone with the “right tech person” and we were talking about replacing parts and changing a modem and he said, *“You know what you really need to do is talk with your tech guy the next time that this happens so you figure out...”* I interrupted him. *“I’ve been talking with my tech God all week and I’ve been praying.”* Then guy on the other end of the phone chuckled and he said, *“I bet you have.”*

When we need a solution, when we need the proper and right solution, when we have walked in many different paths and many different ways, and we have communicated as effectively as we know how, and we are at the end of our rope, things start to break down. They start to break down in grand fashion. You see it in families who are facing a problem and don’t have any of the resources to address it and take care of it. And then what happens? When they have gone as far as they know how to go, they say, *“I can’t do anything more with you. I don’t know how to talk to you. Go away and leave me alone until I can get my head on right.”* Does this sound familiar? We get to the end of our ropes and we start making horribly bad decisions. This isn’t anything new.

The Israelite people are about to make the greatest covenant; one that in this context could never be broken, got to the end of their rope because they got impatient and didn’t ask the right person for help. They went amongst themselves. They went on things that they had **overheard**. They went to Aaron, the second in command. Now you know why there are days when I say *“Talk to Neil.”* (laughter in the congregation) They needed to go to the right one. They needed to be patient. My mentor used to say to

me when I would get impatient about the slow moving nature of the church, she would say “*Like the might turtle, so the church.*” I looked at her. “*Sometimes we have to wait on God’s time and not our own.*” God is infinite and has an infinite amount of time that is held in God’s hands. Because we are only here briefly, we want it all done today. We want to see it manifested in our lifetime. That’s the sinful nature of it. When we only think of ourselves, when we only think of what is best for us in this time, and in this place and in this moment...and we don’t wait on God’s time, on God’s wisdom and on God’s plan, we’re always going to get it wrong.

Will you pray with me?

*Oh God, we are waiting for a word from you. Not one overheard in the mist, where we only get bits and pieces as if it were a cell phone connection gone wrong, but we’re waiting on a land line; a strong connection, one that we hold on to one another and we listen to it together. One where we communicate it and speak it out, where we wrestle over it and we find the direction that you are laying in front of us, so clearly in one voice that we can never get it wrong. O God, if the only part of **you that says** to us is that we are your people and your are our God, and we walk with you as the epistles tell us with gentleness, with kindness and with love for one another with all humility, placing others needs before our own. And O God, when we cannot find it by ourselves, help us to be vulnerable enough to reach out to **You** and to one another. In **Your** holy name, we humbly pray...Amen.*