

## **October 15: Sermon: "Then And Now"**

Exodus 32:1-14

32:1 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."

32:2 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."

32:3 So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron.

32:4 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!"

32:5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD."

32:6 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.

32:7 The LORD said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely;

32:8 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!"

32:9 The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are.

32:10 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."

32:11 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?

32:12 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.

32:13 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.'"

32:14 And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

## **Philippians 4:1-9**

4:1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

4:2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

4:3 Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

4:5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

4:6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

4:7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

4:8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

4:9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

## Sermon

I have to admit I was relieved last week when I dodged having to preach on the ten commandments. I much prefer the Red Sea, the manna in the wilderness and the water pouring from the rock...God and the wilderness loving and supporting the Jewish diaspora. But when God and Moses begin organizing the tribes, building the ark and temple, my interest begins to wane...and that all begins with the commandments.

Yes, as Rev Stinson said, the first three are luminous: the sabbath breath, the rest and loving God, without profanity...but once the sins begin it can be depressing--because we all fail, whether- in fact or spirit. We wander off the path we know to be good for us and others. And the Bible goes into great detail about just how that happens to the Israelites.

Quoting from the chapters that follow:

Anyone who attacks<sup>[a]</sup> their father or mother is to be put to death.<sup>16</sup> “Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be put to death, <sup>17</sup> “Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death. There must be restitution for cows that graze in another’s field and punishments for bribes and plans for festivals.

Remember last week and quoting Exodus 24: 3-4...”When Moses of all the LORD’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, “Everything the LORD has said we will do.” <sup>4</sup> Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.

But Moses returns to the mountain and things go downhill...Aaron is designated a “priest” and given garments of gold and silk. Animals are sacrificed and the tent is sanctified...There is holy water and oil for anointing, incense and spices. And artistry beyond belief...Things go really awry...Aaron, Moses’ brother, who is to be a priest, loses sight of his call. And after all this preparation and pageantry they build the golden calf.

This is barely three months into the 40 years in the desert and things have gone terribly wrong. God is distraught with these “stiff-necked people” who have been given much and who, nonetheless, cannot look beyond the physical reality to the spirit beneath. Moses begs God for temperance and patience and begins the long journey of living by faith, constantly seeking to transmit his faith to others.

Thousands of years later Jesus who continues the same lament for people who hold to their garments and altars without truly understanding the depth of the love God holds for them. Today the world anticipates death and destruction in Gaza and can see it in much the same way. People caught up in conflicts and impatience are praying, and we are praying, for mercy and peace among these people who rise to kill each other.

When we hear the words of Paul to the Phillippians, as Dennis read them, we arrive at a similar instance-- though not on so grand a scale. Euodia and Syntyche had been among those baptized with Lydia and who were now to be working together with Paul and Silas in a small group of disciples ... yet even, just having been baptized, they were fighting.

Paul tells Euodia and Syntyche to stop arguing because their disagreement was causing a rift, not just in their own relationship, but in the whole fabric of the Church. He instructs them to be of “one mind,”. Paul goes on to suggest that the women should settle the matter NOT by determining who was right and wrong in the debate. But that each of them should lay down their *right* to be right—and take up the cross of Christ...the peace which passeth all understanding.

Much of Paul’s letter is devoted to teaching the essentials of humility and showing the Church the importance of unity within the Body of Christ. <sup>1</sup>

whatever is true,  
whatever is honorable,  
whatever is just,  
whatever is pure,  
whatever is pleasing,

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-euodia-teaches-us-about-how-to-handle-conflict-with-believers.html#:~:text=Paul tells Euodia and Syntyche,12:25-26>.

whatever is commendable,  
if there is any excellence  
and if there is anything worthy of praise,  
think about these things.

4:9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Rabbi Benjamin Weiner who serves the Jewish Community in Amherst Massachusetts used a beautiful image at a vigil a few nights ago. He wrote<sup>2</sup>:

*“I feel—to use a metaphor that is all too apropos—like I am underneath the rubble of a collapsed house, trying to lift one heavy beam after another off of my crushed body, as I try to come up toward some sense of clarity and response to the horrors we are experiencing.*

**And continues:**

*We do this by holding on to our resolve, even in the absence of resolution—by knowing and committing to all of the things we must continue to stand and advocate for: the life, well-being, and defense of Am Yisrael, the grieving for victims and the release of captives, our dignity in the face of a world that would judge us without understanding, and without walking in our shoes, the difference between justice and depravity, between the oppressed and the butcher, the inextricability of our pain from the suffering of our counterparts.*

*We must find resolve within ourselves to lift up all of these causes, even as we wrestle with the confusion and despair in our spirits. And we do this—we hope for hope—by continuing, relentlessly, to lift up beam after beam, beam after beam, beam after beam, while dreaming that we can somehow salvage from this rubble enough timber to knock up the frame for a house of peace.”*

I imagine that Moses and God together must have felt this same sense of despair seeing the intended beauty and order of religious community in shambles. And yet these were people he loved.

As I was writing this sermon last night a Jewish friend wrote to tell me his nephews in Israel are deciding whether or not to bring their families out of the country for a while and one is trying to get on those US flights today. And I can't help think of the evacuation from Afghanistan and the thousands left lingering even now outside their homelands. Again and again all reason and promises seem to have tumbled down.

---

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Benjamin Weiner, spiritual leader of the Jewish Community of Amherst

Paul would encourage us as he did with Euodia and Synthyche to pause and realize the effect this has on those who are not Muslim or Jewish or even Christian when they see people in the Holy Land fighting with such vengeance and hatred.

This morning's meditation from the Center for Action and Contemplation offered verses from Isaiah:

*If you remove ...the accusing finger, and malicious speech;  
If you lavish your food on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted;  
Then your light shall rise in the darkness, and your gloom shall  
become like midday....  
"Repairer of the breach," they shall call you,  
"Restorer of ruined dwellings." —Isaiah 58:9–10, 12*

Father Richard writes:

*The task of true religion is to rebind (in Latin, re-ligio) that which is torn apart by temperament, ignorance, and institutionalized evil. Christians are led and grounded by Jesus the Christ, "in whom all things can be held together ... and in whom all things are reconciled" (Colossians 1:17, 20).*

Here within the sanctuary today we are meant to be gathering light and casting out fear together in our prayers. After church your Mission and Outreach Committee is making it possible for those prayers to have feet in this world through letters to our legislators

Lifting judgement, frustration and fear from our hearts that we may love God with all our hearts and all our souls and all our minds is the first step and a great commandment but the second given to us is to work unendingly make peace in our lives with one another.

Each of us has a job to do for we are each pillars of the church  
*"Repairer of the breach  
"Restorer of ruined dwellings."*  
And there is much work to be done.

**Let us pray  
O Holy One in All,  
we hear the news and don't know what to say,  
we see those scenes of violence and don't know how to pray;  
We watch, listen, read, and try to pray but there are no words in us. Bind  
up the broken hearted,  
give grace to those seeking to end the spiral of violence,  
grant wisdom to those seeking peaceful ways to resolve age old conflicts;**

**and give us the prayers, words, and perseverance needed  
to make our discipleship, our efforts for peace and justice count. Amen.**

*[Adapted from the United Reform Church “prayers in a time of conflict”  
<https://urc.org.uk/prayers-in-a-time-of-conflict/>]*