

Exodus 32:1-14 and Matthew 22:1-10

Have you ever been on a “trust walk?” I am remembering a youth program when we were blindfolded...and then each of us were led through the woods by a fellow participant. Have you ever done this? It can seem really scary at first. I remember not trusting at all that the person assigned to be my guide would really guide me...I doubted very much that my partner would actually realize that a low branch might hit me in the face or that there was an upcoming depression in the land that might cause me to trip and fall. I had very little trust...at first!

It took some time walking this way before I slowly began to let my body and my mind just relax and totally let the person guide me. It was freeing to let go of my fears....AND my sense of control...even though I could not see anything! It is a humbling experience that you all should try sometime.

Kathryn Matthews writes that the Israelites, whom Moses was leading through the desert....were on a very long “trust-walk.” They also had no idea whether they were really being guided in the right direction or indeed, whether God was with them or not. They were even having their doubts about Moses!

Let us be in prayer: Trustworthy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

There surely had been enough proof that Moses was IN with God and should be trusted... I mean, the sea had opened up, manna had been sent to feed them, God showed him how to strike a rock to get water...you would think that the Israelites could have waited for a time for Moses to return from his conversation with God.

However... they were human and they began to get impatient. Why was Moses taking so long!?

So they asked Aaron, Moses’ brother, to make an idol for them...something they could worship and celebrate! (I think in their boredom, they really just wanted to party!) So Aaron told them to take off their jewelry...gold rings in the ears of wives, sons and daughters...and bring them to him. He melted this gold and poured it into a mold that created a calf...a golden calf.

The people were excited! Now they had a glittery god to worship that they could see! They built an altar and made sacrifices to it...and then they danced and sang their praises....

Now, if you were here last week, you know that one of the very first commandments that God gave Moses was: *You shall have no other God but me and you shall not worship idols!* Remember that? Because of their impatience and lack of trust...they disobeyed the first commandment already!

Matthews writes that her mother-in-law would at times quote Galatians 6:7 in a low voice saying, "God... will not be mocked."

God was not happy with these reveling Israelites dancing around a golden calf. God was so angry, the people were called "stiff-necked." We know from other parts of the Bible that this was considered a serious insult, whereas we might think it was just a call for a good chiropractor!

Anyway, God was angry and wanted Moses to get out of the way so that in God's wrath the people could be consumed... Now Moses was infuriated... He implored God saying, "Wait, these are your people whom you brought out of Egypt...you can't do this to them!" Moses reminds God of the Divine Intention spoken to Abraham and Isaac and Joseph that their descendants would be as numerous as the stars of heaven...why would God do this to these people?

So, God's mind was changed....and the people were forgiven. Powerful story.

In our personal lives and in our common lives together as part of this country and world, trusting in a God whom we cannot see...can be challenging. When God does not seem to be listening...when God seems to be preoccupied elsewhere, when God seems like some ancient story that is not pertinent anymore, when God is ridiculed and not taken seriously by a whole lot of people or described in such a variety of ways and experienced in such diverse practices.... who has the patience to depend on this kind of Invisible Holiness to guide us? But this story tells us to keep the faith... that we do not need God to be glittery or even visible in a tangible way.

It may be easier to worship something that we can manage and manipulate...to find, as Matthews writes, "some spiritual junk food to feed our deepest hungers." Who or what do you worship in your heart...really....??

Where is your attention...most of the time? Is it on being happy...on your stuff... is it on material well-being and wealth.... Is it on appearances and reputation? Is it on

being recognized for doing good things.... Do you worship money....the almighty dollar, the golden calf...as this picture shows with the words, "Greed and False Idols".

Here is a thought-provoking quote.... St. Augustine defined idolatry as "worshipping what should be *used*...and using what should be worshiped." Think about this...we USE money for our needs and for the good of others but to worship it turns it into something else. Can you think of something that you USE, that you might also worship...your car, perhaps? Your home? Your own talents and skills? How about your laptop, phone or other kind of screen....? Perhaps a good test to see what we "worship" is to think how we would feel without it... Hmmm which would you choose if you had to go without your relationship with God....or your laptop? Which do you use and which do you worship?

The trouble with worshipping false idols is that we do it at the expense of others....and I know that we can be complicit without even realizing it. Worshipping money or power or material things can sometimes hurt others... if our gain comes at other's expense. A little self-examination is called for here!

The picture on the cover is from a demonstration on Wall Street. This bull calf is painted gold and the people seem to be asking, "What is it that we *raise up* and glorify...greed and false idols?" Interesting that a huge bronze bull is the symbol which stands on Wall Street... now there is also a statue of a young woman or girl with hands on her hips standing very defiantly opposing the bull! It was supposed to be a temporary art installation but New Yorkers begged that this little defiant girl should stay. I had Jeff take my picture with her a few weeks ago!

Maybe we all need to stand defiantly facing that greedy part of our own selves that tends to make idols of stuff....and find it hard to hold Holiness foremost in our hearts!

And think about the ways, perhaps, in which we USE what we worship. Using God or religion for our own grandiosity or to achieve a personal agenda of social justice, maybe, or to fulfill a sense of righteousness....then God becomes something else to us... a means FOR us and not a mystery of Holy Relationship WITH us.

We might remember that it is written in the Hebrew Scriptures, and in the words of Jesus, as well as most other religions...that we worship this invisible God...when we *serve* those in need. We worship God...when we feed the hungry, free the oppressed, and do anything to make the world more beautiful *for others*, not *at the expense of them!* Jesus said that when we feed the least of these, we also feed him.

In the movie, *Victoria and Abdul*, the Queen laments to her new Muslim friend that she really doesn't know what her life is all about with all the power that she holds in her hands...and he replies, "Service, Madam, service to others."

With the tragedies that have been on the news, I have been moved by the stories of courageous service by first responders as well as compassionate citizens, all selflessly helping even at their own risks.

Service...and compassion for others....is a way to show our devotion to God!

In our New Testament parable, a king gives a wedding banquet for his son but everyone whom he invites is too busy to come! So the king tekks his servants to go into the streets and invite anyone they can find...good and bad....Throw open the doors and bring in the people from the streets! ALL people are welcome in God's eyes...

The Israelites got impatient and wanted to give up on God and turn their worship towards a trinket, God got mad but Moses convinced God to refrain from wrath...and to remember, that all of us are welcome...at the table! The story gets us to think about our own "conversations" with God. How do you worship and give praise to this life-giving and infinite source of all love? Perhaps each of us might think about our whole life as a kind of "trust-walk" with God?

"Praise ye the Lord..." (We sang this with the children and talked about what it means to sing praises to God.)

Amen.