

What is your Golden Calf?

IN our reading for today we are told that the Israelite people have grown weary waiting for the return of Moses, who has gone up on a mountain to be in the presence of God. The Israelite people, now bound for the Promise Land, had endured years of slavery and oppression under the hand of Pharaoh, but God having heard their cries sent them Moses, to deliver the people out of Pharaoh's hand. Anxious and uncertain of what has become of the man God had sent to deliver them out of the hands of Pharaoh, the people approach his brother Aaron and demand, "come, make gods for us, who shall go before us." IN the absence of Moses, the people have forgotten the God of Moses, their God, who has gone brought them out of the land of Egypt and has gone before them in a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. This God, their God who displayed God's mighty works before Pharaoh, parted the Red Sea and fed the people manna from heaven was absent from their minds.

God had delivered the Israelites from their oppression but now the people had forgotten the mighty works of God. God has committed to be their God; but they have not committed to be God's people. They have failed to recognize their divinely favored status as God's chosen people. However, the people recognized their need to worship. They have been created to worship. The Israelite people, God's chosen people, have been made to worship.

Without the guidance and intervention of Moses, the people turn away from God and are left with a void that needs to be filled. With the absence of Moses, the people turn to Aaron to satisfy their need to fill the void. They demand that he make them gods. With the absence of Moses, Aaron too apparently has forgotten the mighty works of God. Instead of reminding the people of what God has done for them he obliges their request and fashions out of the gold a golden calf and offers it up to the people as their god. Under the guidance of Aaron, the people have replaced their God, the God of Moses with a golden farm animal. This golden man-made statue is to be their god. It is what the people are to bow down and worship. The problem is that although God is far from the minds of the people, the people are in full view of God and God is not pleased.

Now, we may be tempted to hear the story of the golden calf and think “what relevance does this story have for us today as Christians?” As Christians we don’t bow down and worship idols of our own making, we serve a resurrected Christ. The story of the golden calf is clearly about a people that lived long ago, who have forgotten the God who delivered them out of the hands of their oppressor. But I want us to realize that the Israelite people were a people set apart for a purpose. God has called them to be God’s chosen people for a specific reason. The worship of the golden calf was a sign of the people’s rejection as the designated people of God.

As Christians, we too are set apart as a people, we are called out to be the disciples of Jesus Christ, in the world. And like the Israelite people we too recognize our need to worship. As David Foster Wallace puts it, “In the day-to-day trenches of life, there is no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.” Worship is what we are created to do. God is who we are created to worship.

In today’s text the people have chosen to worship a golden calf. We must ask ourselves “what is my golden calf?” What is it that I have chosen to worship? Work, money, my family, my phone, my favorite sports team, religion, politics, my country. Matthew 6: 24 warns us that “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.” We cannot worship both God and the things of this world, we must choose what it is we are going to worship.

When the Israelite people give up their gold rings so that they may have a deity of their own making, they are giving up more than their jewelry they are abandoned their status as God’s chosen people. When we decide to worship the things of this world, we abandon our call to Christian discipleship. John 14:6 Jesus tells the disciples “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” As Christians we are called to live Jesus centered lives.

Recently I was having a conversation with Eli Hernandez and he was telling me about a conversation he had with his children. To their surprise Eli told his children that there is someone they must love and honor more than him. Jesus Christ. We cannot get to the Father except through God's Son, Jesus Christ and yet too often family, work, sports, religion and politics become the idols of worship in our lives. We may attend worship regularly, and actively participate in the life and governance of the church, but Jesus Christ is not Lord of our day to day living. We do not honor God with our whole lives.

We are more connected to our cell phones than we are to each other. We are governed more by our politics than by our faith. We sacrifice church for the sake of rooting for our favorite sport team. We speak words of division and discord instead of unity and reconciliation. We hear the call to discipleship, but we do not respond. We are entrenched in the cultural, societal norms of the world around us. No, we do not bow down to worship golden calves, but we do worship idols of our own making. We get enraptured by the designs for our own making and forget the mighty works of God in our life.

As we hear in our text God is displeased with the Israelite people. They have turned aside from their God and God's anger is turned toward them. It may be hard for some of us to imagine an angry and wrathful God. The God we believe in is gracious and merciful, forgiving. Jesus Christ died on the cross that we may be

forgiven. However, we have been called as the people of God to respond through love and obedience. We must center our lives around our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But Being the imperfect people that we are we will stumble, and we will falter. But there is hope for us. Just as Moses continued to intervene for the Israelite people, even when he was absent from them, Jesus Christ intervenes on our behalf even when we stray from him. Unlike Aaron who failed to call the people to remembrance, Jesus Christ calls us back to God and reminds us of God's mighty works in our life so that we may be reconciled to God. Jesus Christ took the first step to reconcile us with God. How will you respond?

Amen.