

October 15th 2017

Scripture:

Psalm 23

1st Corinthians 10:1-13

Exodus 32:1-14

“God is certainly merciful, and He provides a way.”

Our reading from 1st Corinthians today includes -----

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind.

And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

And yet very often in life it feels like quite the opposite.

At times many of us no doubt we feel as though we are tempted --- or tested ---- or pushed beyond what we can manage --- or want to manage.

At times we find ourselves in situations that seem to be beyond what we are capable of --- more than we can bear.

And at times we feel as though maybe there really isn't a way forward.

But of course there always is --- thanks to God.

Franz Kafka --- the great 20th century short story writer and novelist said ----

“All human errors are impatience --- a premature breaking-off of methodical procedure --- an apparent fencing-in of what is apparently at issue.”

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This is certainly the case for the Israelites in the book of Exodus today.

They become impatient --- and break off from the path God was paving for them with Moses at the lead.

The first verse from Exodus 32 today -----

“When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain they gathered around Aaron and said ---- “come make us a god who will go before us. As for this Moses who brought us up out of Egypt we don’t know what has happened to him.”

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Talk about impatience.

Moses is talking with God --- which is precisely what had been happening the whole time they had been traveling since they were freed from slavery in Egypt.

There is nothing new about Moses leaving the people to speak with God.

And not only is there nothing new about it --- it had become the norm.

God giving directions to Moses --- and then Moses sharing it with the people.

In fact this was the pattern of life for the Israelites ever since they we’re freed from Egypt.

And yet for some reason ---- on this day they just can’t stand waiting for Moses to return from God’s presence.

They suddenly abandon ship --- and do something diametrically opposed to all that God has instructed them to do and be.

They build an idol and worship it --- just like that --- and in truth they have no idea that what they are doing is corrupt and unfaithful.

Moses was taking too long for their liking --- so they decide to go another way ---- saying at the end of the first verse ---- “As for this Moses who brought us up out of Egypt we don’t know what has happened to him.”

Talk about impatient ---- “We don’t know what happened to him.” ---- it’s hard to imagine that just because he was taking so long in their eyes that they would basically disown him ---- saying ---- “we don’t know what happened to him.”

If ever there is an example of impatience in the scriptures --- this is it.

And they’re impatient because Moses is what --- spending too much time with God.

And as if this isn’t enough their impatience is laced with irony as well.

What God was doing with Moses on this particular visit --- as the people became impatient and fashioned a golden calf idol ----- what God was doing as they engaged in idol worship was ----- wait for it ----- what God was talking about was ----- worship.

Talk about irony --- God is talking with Moses about faithful worship and they are engaging in idol worship --- the golden calf.

Indeed God goes into very specific details about worship.

Chapters 25-31 of the book Exodus are devoted to instructions about worship -----

Including:

----- the collection various materials for the furnishing of the worship space

--- the ark and the atonement cover

--- the table of the bread of His presence

--- the golden lamp stand

----- the courtyard ---- the place surrounding the worship space --- a part of the worship space really

---- then God goes on to tell of the personnel --- the priests

---- and then God goes on to tell of the garments of the priests

--- and then the ordination of the priests

----- and then the rest of the provisions for the space --- the altar and the incense ----- the collection of money ----- the bronze basin ----- anointing oil

----- and then God talks about the artisans who are going to build some of these things

---- and then finally God talks about the Sabbath.

And all the while that God is --- “taking too long” ----- taking too long speaking with Moses about worship ----- the people corrupt worship by fashioning an idol and making sacrifices and thanksgivings to it.

“Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “This is your god, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.” So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.”

They made a calf --- and then they build an altar in front of the calf --- and then they sacrificed and made offerings to the calf ---- and then they said ---- - “this is our god who brought us up out of Egypt.”

And God is furious.

Mercy later --- but for now it’s fury.

Picking it up at verse 7 ----

“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf.

They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘This is your god, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’

“I have seen these people,” the Lord said to Moses, “and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

Destruction and fury ---- are God’s first reaction to their corruption ---- He wants to kill them.

These are the same people who twice leading up to this corruption said ---- “We will do everything the Lord has said.”

“We will do everything the Lord has said.” ----- they tell Moses --- not once but twice.

Exodus 19 --- verses 7 and 8 ----- “So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “we will do everything the Lord has said.”

And then again in Exodus 24:3 ---- “When Moses went and told the people all the Lord’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, “everything the Lord has said we will do.”

And now they do the exact opposite.

Breaking Commandments 1 and 2 in one great impatient and ironic self serving act of misguided worship.

God must have been shaking His head in disgust --- confusion --- anger and frustration --- God must have been grieving.

“I make it clear to them that I will not test them beyond what they can manage ---- and this is how soon they succumb --- this is how soon they break away --- corrupting all that matters most to me.

I have just brought them up out of Egypt --- the Passover --- I have made a covenant with them --- they have responded favourably --- not once but twice --- and now I am just giving them the necessary instructions to do what is right and pleasing in my eyes ---- what will bring glory to my name -- what will nourish their souls ---- generation after generation ---- after generation ----- and this is how they respond.”

““I was taking too long.” ---- is that all they can say.”

“Bow down before the golden calf.” --- is that really what they want to do? -- - Do they really think a gold statue has anything to do with how they got away from Pharaoh?”

“In their impatience they have corrupted worship --- broken the very foundation of our covenantal relationship.”

“Perhaps they’re hopeless after all --- perhaps I’ll just have to kill them off and start fresh with Moses and build my nation from Him instead of Abraham.”

That’s how God responded to their impatience and corruption.

At least initially.

Thankfully Moses spoke up --- and petitioned on behalf of the people --- and mercy prevails.

Picking it up now at verse 11 -----

“But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. “Lord,” he said, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and 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 wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.

Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’”

Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.”

“Then the Lord relented and did not bring on His people the disaster He had threatened.”

Thankfully God’s wrath and outrage --- was tempered with mercy and grace.

And the truth is --- very often --- too often ----- we are just like the Israelites ----- impatient with God.

As Kafka said ---- “All human errors are impatience --- a premature breaking-off of methodical procedure --- an apparent fencing-in of what is apparently at issue.”

The Israelites broke off prematurely from the path that God was opening up before them.

God is abundantly merciful ---- God will not test us beyond what we can manage ---- He will bend us ----- but He won't break us ----- and He will always provide a way.

“And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

But --- just like the Israelites --- we are often far too impatient.

We want things when we want them.

And we want things how we want them.

Thankfully this tale of impatience and self centeredness is only a subtext --- a sidebar --- a footnote ---- embedded within the greater story that is God's saving love ----- amazing grace and abundant mercy.

Thankfully the beauty --- goodness ---- and truth --- that is God's saving love in Jesus Christ ---- is the greater truth that envelopes us.

We don't read passage like this to focus on the impatient and corrupt Israelites ----- we can get that anywhere in life ---- impatience ---- corruption ---- these things aren't particularly difficult to find in the world.

We read this passage to be reminded of the great mercy of God --- which can be a little more challenging to see at times.

God's justice --- what He would really like to do sometimes --- what He will eventually do --- in His time --- is always tempered with mercy and with love.

If we only hear the message of God's grace when we are able to see grace --- than we are not really faithful or trusting at all.

We have to hear and celebrate the message of grace even when grace appears to be absent ---- we are not simply a people of evidence we are a people of faith and trust.

That's a huge part of what this passage means ---- remember --- and take a wider angle view --- God is working at all times don't be impatient with Him ---- trust ---- have faith --- persevere.

The message of grace is eternal --- and the message of grace is true even when what we perceive --- even when what we see with our eyes is anything but grace.

God looks down on His people in Exodus 32 and they are doing anything but honouring His grace.

They're melting down gold ---- making an idol --- building an altar to this idol --- making sacrifices and offerings --- sharing a meal and engaging in all kinds of self serving revelry.

And initially God thinks it's hopeless --- "Kill em all!" --- He says to Moses.

If the only time we are ever graceful is when we can see grace --- than we are as misguided as the Israelites today.

The message of grace is true even when we can't see it all that well --- if at all.

It really wouldn't be all that outrageous if God had of wiped them al out as He initially thought.

"I have seen these people --- and they are a stiff-necked people. ----- Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them that I may destroy them."

But God doesn't just work that way ---He doesn't act based on our actions --
- He acts based on His mercy --- and His love --- and the promise that He made that in Christ our ultimate destiny is good.

God doesn't love us because deep down He thinks that we can be rehabilitated --- and suddenly become good once again.

We can't be rehabilitated we can only be saved ---- as long as we're here --- on earth --- pre second coming of Christ ----- we aren't ever going to suddenly be good in any kind of lasting way --- it just isn't going to happen.

We need Christ for that ---- and until He returns we will continue to mess things up.

And the Israelites in Exodus 32 are perhaps the greatest example of this.

God doesn't love us because of what we do ---- He loves us because of who He is.

God still finds a way to love and forgive and exercise mercy towards these impatient foolish misguided Israelites as they fashion a calf and worship it in His very presence.

The people mess up ---- and badly.

And God sighs ----- and shakes His head --- grieves no doubt ----- and does what He always does ---- mercy --- grace --- love --- forgiveness -----beauty --- goodness --- and truth.

God already knows there is a great and beautiful rescue plan in motion ----- --- God knows that we cannot simply pull up our boot straps and be better --- be good --- and always do what is right.

He knows that the calf at the foot of the mountain isn't just an isolated incident.

He knows that His people simply cannot get it right --- rehabilitation isn't an option --- it saving and rescuing that we need.

And only God can do this.

It's moments like this --- in the life of God and His people that point directly to the need for Christ.

We have to be saturated --- enveloped --- literally coated --- and anointed --- ----- by the mercy of God ----- if there is any hope of us ever getting

along and getting it right ---- putting God first --- following Commandment #1.

Commandment 1 ----- is the very first step to faithfulness ---- it's #1 for a reason ----- God first.

And the people said --- "We will do everything the Lord has said."

But very quickly they have a change of heart.

As they gather at the foot of the mountain waiting for Moses to come back down --- it goes from ---- "We will do everything the Lord has said." ----- to ----- "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain they gathered around Aaron and said ---- "come make us a god who will go before us. As for this Moses who brought us up out of Egypt we don't know what has happened to him."

Talk about impatience.

Thankfully ----- God was merciful.

Thankfully God is always merciful.

And that's the gospel.

God's mercy ----- all end well because of His mercy.

It's really all quite a beautiful thing.

The people mess up ---- and badly --- that's us ---- we're the messer uppers.

And then God sighs ----- and shakes His head --- grieves no doubt ----- and does what He always does ---- mercy --- grace --- love --- forgiveness ----- beauty --- goodness --- and truth.

It almost as though the more we mess up the closer God us to Him.

Until finally it got so bad that down He came in Christ.

And of course this is chiefly what we celebrate and remember and share ----- and hope for --- and wait for --- God coming again in Christ.

We hope for --- and we wait for the goodness of God in Jesus Christ --- we remember and we celebrate this promise ---- that Christ will come again --- that Psalm 23 --- is all true --- that the Lord is our shepherd ---- even though we walk through death warmed over --- He's here ---- and His goodness is ultimately where we will dwell forever.

It's all true ---- and the foolishness we see around us and sometimes even participate in ---- are but footnotes in the grand and beautiful story of God's great and saving love for His creation.

The Exodus was a journey --- the journey --- a prototype for what walking with God is like.

And Exodus ends how ---- go check out the last few verses of exodus 40 ---- - it ends with the glory of the Lord filling the Tabernacle.

It ends like Psalm 23.

It ends as the gospel ends ---- us with God --- in His house --- drenched in His glory.

Literally ----- soaked ----- enveloped ----- just drenched in His glory.

You know when you're out in your t-shirt and you get caught in the rain ---- you know that feeling --- when you're soaked to the bone.

That's how drenched we are in God's glory.

We are abundantly blessed.

And that is why we are here --- at worship to worship --- to praise God ----- ----- to thank God ---- to fall at His feet.

If God walked in that door right now --- what would you do ----- I'd probably fall down to my knees and pray --- maybe sing praises after praying.

That's the disposition we ought to have every Sunday as we walk through those doors ----- God is here --- and what are we doing for Him in His presence.

God is good.

He is gracious.

He is merciful.

And in Christ He provides the way to dwell in His wonderful presence forever.

As we will sing shortly -----

Bless the Lord
Oh my soul ---- oh my soul
Worship His holy name
Sing like never before
Oh my soul
I'll worship Your holy name.

God is good and gracious and loving and saving.

We are so very fortunate.

Amen.