

July 2 2017

**Reading from the Bible** Psalm 95 1-7

Exodus 32:1-10

Exodus 10: 15-24

**Sermon**

Exodus 33:9

Probably everyone in this room knows a little bit or maybe a lot about Moses. Poor Moses was stuck with what God called stiff-necked people. He was often aggravated with them. His leadership was constantly being challenged. And that is part of the story today. The people wanted to stone him. Remember they were just barely out of their Dead Sea event—remember the waters parting the people running through with the Egyptians barreling after them. The people walking on dry land. They were freed from generations of slavery. You would think that awesome event would have made an impression on them. Memories have a way of doing that except maybe not so much for the people of God.

The Hebrews were whiners. Did Moses bring us out here to this desert to kill us? Let's go back to Egypt. They complained about not having water—we are all going to die! We don't have any food! They complained about eating the manna, manna day after day. We are tired of manna-quail quail quail—we are tired of quail. They wanted to return to slavery—the Good Old Days. They reminded Moses that he brought them out to die. Then they murmured. Don't you like that word murmur? Unfortunately, that is what happens in a lot of churches sometimes a lot of murmuring and whispering starts. Never mind that there was a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night led them on. Now, we, with all of our sophisticated life we would not complain. We would have recognized the pillars were sensational and reassuring. And after all those Hebrews knew Moses talked to God—his face would be shining

Then came the day when he went up into the mountain and he was gone for forty days. Forty days is a long time. He left Aaron his brother in charge—a capable man, he thought. They knew that Moses talked to God often but after forty days they were pretty sure he was not coming back. They figured he was dead. So they said, “We need a god.” We need an idol to worship” They hadn't gotten to the time of prophets who reminded the people that if they go after idols that can't see or hear they would be in trouble with God. The time of Elijah went the people worshipped an idol.

So Aaron was the human spokes person. He was surrounded by all these whining people and he felt he had to give them something to worship. Maybe even Aaron wanted to do it too, He caved in to the Hebrew desires. Nowhere in the Scripture says Aaron argued with them. We would like to think he did. The

Scripture said, “They said to Aaron, make gods for us.” A god that would go before us to replace Moses. As for this Moses, this man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what become of him.” Then Aaron said to them, ”Take the gold rings off your wives’ ears, sons and daughters’ ears and bring the gold to me.” So that is what all the people did. They took off the gold earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took the gold and melted it down and made a golden calf. And then he said to them, this is your god that brought you out of the land of Egypt. When Aaron saw what happened, he told them that tomorrow there would be a festival. The next day they had burnt offerings and they all sat down to eat, drink and rose up to party.

Later when Moses confronted Aaron, Aaron said to him, “They put the gold in the fire and poof out of the fire came the golden calf.” He had a different spin on the story. And at the very end of the story it says Aaron was at fault. The Hebrews were abandoning God and their murmuring and grumbling they were rebelling against God. It was a slippery slope. The whole Hebrew nation had become sinful and had taken up idol worshipping. What happens next?

Verse 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; 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 worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”’ The Lord said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you, of you Moses I will make a great nation.’”

God was going to destroy the people that he had called. What was Moses to do? He did what he usual did. He prayed and implored God not to do what he said he would do. Moses said, “What will other people say? He told God, “I know who you are but the pagan people do not.” They are watching Israel and your dealings. Moses said, “If you kill them, they will say, you, O God, is not able to make a nation of them. Turn from your fierce wrath, change your mind and don’t bring disaster on them.” And that shows Moses’ humility and love for his people and prayed so hard for them. Amazing isn’t it.

You would think that maybe Moses would wash his hands of the Hebrews after all the whining and on top of that God said to him. God had said, “Moses I will make you a great nation-that would be a great temptation. But Moses doesn’t yield to that. He reminds God. In verse 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.”” Moses knew God well enough that he could say, this is not your character. I know you are a God of

righteousness but you are also a God of mercy and peace.” And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people”.

Moses goes down the mountain and he has the copy of the 10 Commandments in his hand.

Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses. “It is a sound of war in the camp.” But Moses said it more like “party-time.” He could hear the partying clear up the side of the mountain. Verse 19 ”As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses’ anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf that they had made, burned it with fire, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the Israelites drink it.”

Moses said to Aaron, ‘What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?’ And Aaron said, ‘Do not let the anger of my lord burn hot; you know the people, that they are bent on evil. They said to me, “Make us gods, 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.” So I said to them, “Whoever has gold, take it off”; so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!’

When Moses saw that the people were running wild (for Aaron had let them run wild, to the derision of their enemies), then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, ‘Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me!’ And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. (The royal priesthood)” and they took swords and killed about 3,000 people. Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin.

So Moses returned to the Lord and said, ‘Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written.’ But the Lord said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; see, my angel shall go in front of you. Nevertheless, when the day comes for punishment, I will punish them for their sin.’ Then the Lord sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf—the one that Aaron made. And God punished even the upper leadership God.

Moses eventually got the second copy of the 10 Commandments. He goes back to the Lord and prays one more time, “I need to know if we are good. God said, “My presence will go with you and I will give you rest.” And Moses said to God How will I know that I have found favor in your sight- I and your people unless you go with us. And in this way others on the face of the earth will know you are with us” Moses asks God, “Show me your glory.” And God said, “I will show all my goodness and will show all mercy to my people. And eventually the Lord passes before him and reminds Moses, “The Lord, the Lord, God is merciful and

gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parent upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

And Moses quickly bowed his head towards the earth, and worshipped. He said, 'If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sins.'

Moses understood it wasn't all about him; it was about God and God's people. It was about a covenant. The covenant was started with Noah, on to Abraham, and to Moses. It was the same God. Moses experienced God and believed God and he kept the covenant even when the people lost sight of what God had done for them. It was going to happen again. It was going to happen again in Numbers 14 and the story is repeated. It was another story for another time and another prayer. God couldn't start a nation with this group of people who wanted to go back to the good old days so he gave them 40 years in the desert which was enough time for the generation of stiff-necked people to die off and new generation to rise up.

We are so often tempted to trade in our allegiance to the powers that be and we give a lot more to the aspects of life than they should ever have. We need to have the awareness that Jesus shows us God's Character. God has promises to take us with patience and blessings when we recognize the majestic power of the Lord like Moses did. We are the called people of God not just in this place but for all places and times. The blessings are for us and for all coming generations. God brings together those who are near away and those who are far off gives blessings beyond our wildest dreams.

Moses stood in the gap to intercede with God because he experienced God and recognized the character of God. He was the leader for a people who needed God's forgiveness and restoration. They were a people that Moses loved beside all odds. His was a commission and covenant that Moses could not and would not abandon. Jesus Christ is the same. He will not abandon us in our waywardness He fulfills the blessing. He stands in the gap for us when we sin, when we rebel, when we yearn for the good old days and when we wish for something more tangible. In all the ways Jesus stands in the gap and offers to us his grace and prays to God. Jesus is sufficient.

May we learn and take away from this story that God calls people like Moses to stand in the gap to do what we can't do for ourselves There is a consequence to sin. God has to deal with it.

Remember the motto of our church denomination that says wherever you are on your journey you are welcome here. Let us pray:

Great God in heaven, sometimes I wonder why you bother with us. We major in trivialities. We lose focus. We test you. We are often just as stiff-necked and grumbling as those people of long ago. But you have called us through Moses and through Jesus. They remind us that your character is one of love, the good life, and the eternal life. Help us to trust in Jesus as our great intercessor. Help us to trust you in your goodness and help us to be the kind of people you want us to be Amen