It was Halloween, and they were more into tricks than treats. Living in the country meant a long walk from place to place, but this night the walk would be worth it, for the Walz sisters were the target. There was no man living there to grab them, and beat them for their misdeed.

Mostly their trick was making noise, corn thrown against the side of the house, yelling, making a racket. Then just as they had planned out of the house came the two sisters, intent on punishment for these little boys. Into the barn the boys rushed, with the sisters in close pursuit. And all of the boys, but the very youngest laughed and taunted as they ran away free. But the youngest, the slowest suddenly felt a hand grasp his jacket, fear grip his heart. He slipped out of the jacket, left it behind, and raced home.

As I first heard this story, I could hardly believe that my father was that little boy, causing trouble, getting caught, the next day being punished by his own father. My father who did everything right, so good, so wise, so serious, once little, just like me.

This story was a beginning, for my father was as wise and as powerful as he is now. The years have passed, and I have learned many things, but my father has changed. And through it all, I have grown and matured, seeing him in a new light.

When we are young, everything seems so simple. Mothers and fathers are all powerful, all wise, immortal. But as we grow and mature, we see them in a new light.

God bless mommy and daddy and my kitty, the child prays. She speaks and God hears, and God will keep her world safe. The faith of a child. But her kitty gets hit by a car, and daddy and mommy are divorced. And she begins to wonder about this god who is almighty, and hears every prayer, and who can be everywhere all at once.
For those of you who are still wondering, no longer able to see God with the three year olds eyes, we have an interesting first lesson today.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down; for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves; they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them for themselves a molten 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!" And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people and behold, it is a stiff-necked people; now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; but of you I will make a great nation.

If it weren't God speaking here, I might wonder whether the speaker wasn't sounding a little childish. Your people Moses, the ones you brought up out of the land of Egypt, almost as if this whole thing had been Moses idea and not Gods. Now Moses might have said, My people? you were the one who picked me for this job with that burning bush. I was happy herding sheep. This is your idea, God, your people. You were the one who led them out of Egypt with your pillar of cloud and fire. But instead Moses said this:

0 Lord, why does thy wrath burn hot against thy people whom thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them forth to slay them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce anger and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham and Isaac, and Israel thy servants to whom thou didst swear by thyself, and didst say to them, I will multiply your descendents as the stars of heaven and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendents, and they shall inherit it forever. And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people.

Impossible. The all knowing, almighty, never changing God could never be like this: changing his mind, getting talked out of what he intended to
do by a mere mortal

Father's raise children. teach them train them, teach them change them. Everyone knows that. But now that I am a father, I find that in the midst of my teaching and training and raising, that my children are changing me, teaching me, training me, raising me. I'm the father, I'm in charge, but how different my children have made me from what I once was.

The Lord adopted some children of his own. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, a whole people Israel, a man named Moses. He set about the business of shaping them, of molding them. But as we read in scripture in our lesson today, and in many other places, we find that the Lord was also changed by his people.

That is why Jesus was such a stumbling block for so many. The Lord had talked about the righteous, the holy, the keepers of the law. But after centuries of waiting for obedience through the law, God tried something new. And the law keepers murmured: Jesus receives sinners and eats with them.

Suddenly it was as if God came down off the mountain and joined the partying people. He did not rain down his wrath on them, but went among them, walked with them. Once he had been ready to burn the whole flock if he could just start over with one righteous one, but now Jesus told this parable: What man among you if he as a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the 99 in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his neighbors saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. Just so I tell you there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentence.

How ridiculous! None of us would leave the 99 in the wilderness, in the place of danger, and go after the one. But Jesus does. 99 are not enough, a faithful remnant not enough, good people are not enough. God wants every one. Once in Noah's time God flooded all the evil ones with death, but in Jesus time God is about something new, flooding every evil one with forgiveness, washing them into Jesus in Holy Baptism. Once God was content to have one people
Israel, to be his children, now he wants every people, every nation, every single one for his won. He's changed. God can't change. He has to be just the way I understood him to be when I was a little child, the Pharisees said. But Jesus changed the heart of God by giving his life for the sheep that are lost.

Do we believe God can be changed? Of course we do, why else would we pray for those in need. Like Moses we want to remind God of his obligation. We are Moses reminding God that sufferers and sinners all around us are his own lambs. We ask him to turn his heart, their lives toward blessing. We remind God of who he is, what he has promised, and he listens. And forgives, and heals, and blesses.

And more than pray, we join our Lord Jesus out there where the lost are to be found. The 99 no longer huddle in fear, but knowing his rod and his staff to be our comfort, we seek out the sinners and tax collectors, the lost. For every lost one saved means joy in heaven and on earth.

In a few moments we will install our Sunday school teachers and league advisors for the next year. They in very clear ways are joining the shepherd in his work. Every lamb brought home, safe in Christ, this is their work. And there will be great joy in heaven.