

*7The Lord said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; 8they 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 worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" 9The Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. 10Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation." 11But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, "O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. 13Remember 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.'" 14And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.*

If the world were the way the world should be, children would never have to be ashamed of their parents. Fathers would never come home drunk, or be seen with some girlfriend.

Mothers would never lose their temper and shout and shame their children in front of friends.

Parents would never lose control and argue the way five year olds might. They would never return home from church having heard about love and forgiveness and all the way home be full of critical words about everyone and everything.

If the world were the way the world should be parents would not blame when something goes wrong, sometimes more childish than the children themselves.

But the world is not the way the world should be.

A sign of health in families is when people are allowed to tell the truth about what is wrong. No lying or pretending or covering up. No denying what is there for all to see, protecting the parent's good name at the expense of the child's grasp of reality. A sign of health in families is when the weakness and failings of parents are recognized and openly discussed. Sins are named, confessed, forgiveness is asked, forgiveness is given.

I begin with this discussion this morning so that we can see the health and the truth that stand behind our scriptures. For the first lesson today is certainly embarrassing to God, embarrassing to us who call God our Father. Yet in the Holy Scriptures this embarrassing moment is not covered over - nor are excuses made - but it is left for all of us to see.

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 worshiped 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. No let me alone so that my anger may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.

The Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth, would not take responsibility for his own actions. God came seeking Moses through a burning bush. God pushed him to go to Pharaoh much against Moses' own will. God orchestrated the exit from Egypt pushing the people onward when in fear they wanted to go back. But as soon as they made this golden calf, worshiped it, God said, "Your people, Moses, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt." God blaming, as if God had nothing to do with it at all - the almighty God, acting like a child, ready to wipe them all out, and start over.

But his child, Moses, became his teacher. O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Whose people are they? They are your people, God. You brought them out. Moses was speaking the truth.

And then he spoke some more: “Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains and consume them from the face of the earth?’ Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. 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 star of heaven and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants and they shall inherit it forever.’”

This child of God was trying to change his creator, turn his creator.

And God listened.

Scripture says, “The Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.”

Sometimes children confront their fathers with the truth, and fathers listen and change.

Sometimes children confront their fathers with the truth, and fathers deny the truth, and beat their children.

The Lord listened to Moses. He is that kind of Father.

We race through time, forward 1200 years. Sin is still sin, some worship God, some worship money and the things of the creation rather than the creator.

Jesus has been having lunch with some folks that might have been perfectly comfortable partying around the golden calf of Moses' time. The religious people object.

Jesus tells two parables.

God is like a shepherd searching for one lost lamb. God does not write off the loss but goes out into the wilderness like a poor shepherd who cannot afford the loss of one. And when he finds it he celebrates.

God is like poor widow, who will search and search for one lost coin. And when she finds it she celebrates.

How far God has come from the days when he was ready to wipe out the whole nation of Israel and start over. Now he is out searching and hunting for every lost one.

Maybe Moses changed God that day. Scripture says that because of Moses argument God changed his mind.

You and I are invited to pray to this God who could change his mind. You and I are invited to speak to this God about all that is on our hearts. You and I are invited to speak the truth to this God, whatever that truth is, and to not be afraid.

This God will hear, God will consider your words and mine. And this Lord will celebrate every time he and we are able to find a lost lamb, a lost coin, every time he and we are able to call someone away from worshipping the golden calves and to bring them to eat and drink in the presence of God's own son.

Thanks be to God.