

Pastor T.C. Arnold
25th Sunday after Trinity
Exodus 32:1-20
November 8th, 2015

“Aaron, we need new gods. We don’t know what happened to Moses. Our great leader has left us. He went away to talk to God and he has not returned. Everything hinged on Moses. We are in awe of this man and God was with him. Now, who do we have to speak to God for us? Now we need our own gods to help us out of this terrible situation in the desert. Aaron, you are the second in command. Build us new gods, now.”

How silly does this sound? Yet Aaron yields to their desires. But he doesn’t make multiple gods for the people – even though that is what they wanted. He makes just one god – a golden god – and perhaps by making one instead of many, the Lord won’t be that mad at the people. And then these words were spoken, “*These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.*” But Aaron only made one false god. Perhaps the people were talking about the one true God and the new god who will be put before them to protect them in the desert. They now had two gods. One was with Moses and no longer with the people. The other god is made of gold, on an altar that the people have built for it, and is “ever present” with them wherever they go.

That’s what all of us want, isn’t it – a god who is not absent? The holy man of Israel went away to talk to God. Maybe they decided this was a lost cause and they rode off together into the sunset and left the poor children of Israel to fend for themselves.

For us today, we want the same thing as the children of Israel wanted. We want an “ever-present” God. A “God with us” that we can see and count on when the going gets tough. We want a God who we know will be there especially when the pain and heartache during this game called life consumes us and the ones we love. A God with us when we need him. A God with us when we cry out. A God with us when we need someone to tell us what to do when difficult decisions are set before us. A God with us who will speak plainly, who will not mince words, who will tell us directly how to handle the situation or fix the problem right now. We want the same thing as the children of Israel wanted.

So, where do we go to find God? Do we call on Aaron to make for us an “ever-present” deity to guide us along life’s path? Do we melt down gold and build golden calves for ourselves, pray to them and have them lead us about our days? We would say that is ridiculous. We don’t do such things like that. It’s hard for us to even imagine how God’s people would ignore Moses and the Lord and think that somehow building their own god would be better than the one who has provided for them in the desert and made promises to them throughout history. It’s hard to imagine why all those people would get so impatient and then believe that they could make a better god for themselves.

But we do this all the time. We build a god of convenience when God’s strict commands in His Word are just too difficult to follow. We build a god of following the crowd when acceptance is the most important thing. We build a god of pleasure when our wants and desires are clearly for whatever is making us feel really good at the time even though it may be at the expense of our loved ones or even ourselves. We build a god out of anything or everything that matters more to us than the Lord – even if it’s just this one time. Beloved, stop building your golden calf. These “ever-present” gods that we think bring us so much satisfaction will bring us nothing of what God wants for us. And what God wants for us is so much more.

Beloved, we do have an ever-present God. We have a God who speaks to us daily through His Word and we can speak to Him. It is true we get impatient with Him. It is true that His works and ways are not always our ways. It is true we can be confused by what God is doing, how He is handling the situation, why things are the way they are. But we don't have to ever be confused about God's presence with you and me during our daily walk in life. We know He is with us and that is true because He says so.

One of the very worst feelings we could ever have is the feeling of being abandoned. Being abandoned means being left alone, without support, and without love. Being abandoned is scary because there is no telling what kind of terrible things one would have to confront without the help of others.

My paternal grandfather was abandoned as a young boy. In approximately 1915 he was found by police officers roaming the streets of East St. Louis, IL – no father or mother would step up and claim him. No one knows for how long he was living on the streets. They eventually found foster families for the young Clifford Arnold to live with... many of these families had farms so they could use the boy to do much of the work. My grandfather never talked about these early days with my father and his siblings. We knew very little about this until he was close to death and he shared these early memories with my sister.

One would have to believe that the feeling of being left alone is not only one of the most hurtful feelings but also one of the scariest feelings. Where would young Clifford Arnold go next? Who would “parent” him and provide for his needs? Who would give him the proper rules to follow and teach him to become a man? Who knows how many times someone was worried about such things for the sake of my grandfather. Who knows how many times he himself was concerned about such things.

Being left alone is frightening. Having no body is terrifying – especially when you need help. No golden calf will help dispel your loneliness. No made-up god will comfort you and calm your fears. We are going to have to go to the real thing on this one. And the real thing makes a promise: *“I am with you always to the very end of the age.”* The real thing says, *“Never will I leave you and never will I forsake you.”* Even those days when you feel the most alone, you are not. When we suffer the most, God knows that suffering even more. When we felt as if God is never coming down with Moses from the holy mountain to save His people, He will and He does. Thanks be to God.

So instead of asking Aaron for a new god to be with us, we seek after the Lord and Him only. We seek His will for our lives. We seek repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And just like He promised, the Lord has not abandoned us. The Lord remains with us at every turn, even when those turns in life are lonely turns. It's true we have lonely times. But we are never alone.

There is nothing false about our God. He is not made of the things of this world – though many like to serve such gods, and we drool over them at times as well. There is nothing false about the way He suffered for you. There is nothing false about the living sacrifice, our Savior Jesus, who loved you so much – as to say I am with you, I die for you, I will always be with you. There is nothing that man created to make God great. His love for you is heavenly – so immeasurable that it can only be divine. One God, with us always, always loving, and all that we need. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.