

Pastor T.C. Arnold
25th Sunday after Trinity
Exodus 32:1-20
November 18th, 2018

It wasn't the shouts of victory that God heard. It wasn't the cry of defeat. It was the sound of singing.

They were singing praises to their "new" god. Just as we have been singing to the one TRUE God this morning, Israel had a reason... a very bad reason... to sing on that infamous day. They sang because their new god was "present." They had a god to worship that stood before their very eyes... they could see it... they could honor it... they could sing praises to it. This god had all sorts of value. It's made from their own hands... and from their own valuable stuff. See how valuable this golden calf is. And it's there, right before their very eyes.

This is better than their old God. The God that WAS leading them but now has "apparently" abandoned them. They were being led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night... God was present for them... and Moses, their fearless human leader, was with them too. Out of Egypt he led them. Through the Red Sea he led them. Into the desert he led them. But now they are gone. Where did they go? Up that mountain they went and they haven't been seen since. Moses and God have abandoned the people and they were becoming grossly impatient.

So they took matters into their own hands. And when God heard the sound of singing, He told Moses, there is something wrong. You need to go check it out. So he did. And when Moses saw it, he was angry. So angry. He dropped the stone tablets... and indication that they have broken every one of the commandments at once... the first: You shall have no other god's beside me... and subsequently all the rest. He burned the calf and then ground it to a powder and made them drink it. This sin is within you... it's deep inside.

It was a surprise and a shock. How could they do this? Didn't they see God's mighty power at the Red Sea? Has He not taken care of them in the desert with water and manna along the way? And yet they folded because they didn't know where God was. He was "too long" on coming down off that mountain. They needed a god "Now!"

Funny... God and Moses were up on that mountain talking about how God was going to be present with His beloved people all the time. God was giving the instructions for building the temple. He was showing him how He would be with the people in the land of promise all the days of their lives. He was preparing Moses, and subsequently all of Israel, for the way that He would take care of them. Even the giving of the law was a part of this plan. God was saying to the people... "This is how I will take care of you. I will give you my temple... my presence with you all your days... and even a Word to live by for you and your families." But while all the plans and preparations were taking place, the people convinced themselves that God and their fearless leader had left... never to return.

I suppose it's easy to feel that way after a while. We pray so long about that one thing that gives us the most grief... the one thing we worry about the most. "Lord, in the midst of these troubling times carry us along and make it better," we say. "Lord, I'm not sure how much of this I can take, the pain is just too great," we say. "Lord, I know you promise that you hear me, that you are with me, but I don't feel it. This is all too hard. I can't handle it any longer. It's been too long with too many discouraging outcomes," we say.

Now I intentionally did not name the trouble and the struggle with those cries we send heavenward when despair weighs heavy on our hearts. I didn't mention anything because I want

you to put your troubles in those prayers. Those troubles, threats and sufferings that you deal with on a daily bases... that persist... that continue day in and day out. I want you to put your persistent prayer within those words I just gave you. You know, the situation that you wonder if God is actually listening to... the one that you wonder if He will ever do anything about. I know that you think those Israelites are crazy for abandoning God. But they truly believed that they were being abandoned themselves. They thought God left them and, therefore, they needed another.

Oh we could never imagine building a false image and replacing God with it. We would never do that. That's just silly. No, rather, instead we will just get mad at God. We will ignore Him. We won't make a god out of our jewelry. We will, however, make a god out of our own laziness, out of our work, out of comfy bed. We will make a god out of excuses that range from the kids activities just take too much time to the kids activities take too much of our money. Oh no... we will not build a silly god out of jewelry. We would much rather build a god out just about anything and everything else.

Perhaps we are apt the think that God has abandoned His people. That terrible thing you were thinking about... it happened. The country that we love... seems to be going down the toilet. That fear we have... well, its right before our eyes.

Beloved in the Lord, when this happens, God has not abandoned you. No, rather, He suffers alongside of you... with you. He does not leave you in the midst of your struggles and your fears. He instead bears you up in them and will strengthen you. When times get tough, we want to run from God because we think He has run from us. But He hasn't. Don't run from God. Charge all the more into His Word and call out to Him with the prayers that well-up deep within your heart. He tells us to be honest with Him.

It's tempting to try to find another god when we feel as if God has abandoned us. It's tempting to want to give God the cold shoulder when He does not answer the prayers we have in the way we want Him to. It's tempting to want to believe that God doesn't care for us when really bad things happen. So, when it does happen, and it will, dive headlong into the Word of God. Approach Him with your prayers, your questions, and your needs. He has not left you, nor abandoned you.

When it seemed as though Jesus was not paying much attention to His disciples or others who needed Him, He was really only occupied with one thing. And that was bearing the cross for you. When He wasn't racing to the bedside of a ruler's daughter who was dead, when he wasn't healing the sick or giving sight to the blind, Jesus was carrying the cross, His cross, your crosses, to Calvary's Holy Mount. When we think our Lord has turned His back on us, He has rather gathered up all your sins and placed them on Himself to do the perfect work of dying for your sake. Never forget, beloved in the Lord, Jesus is active. And the active work of Jesus is actively working in you right this very minute.

It wasn't the shouts of victory that God heard. It wasn't the cry of defeat. It was the sound of singing. Sing not about a new god that promises happiness. Sing about the Lord who promises you steadfastness, strength, hope and peace. Sing about our Lord who, in the midst of the day of trouble, promises never to leave you or forsake you. Sing in these grey and latter days, because God is with you, He loves you, and He will not abandon you. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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