

Exodus 32:1-14

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, the Christ. The one who brings new life despite our thoughts and actions. Amen.

Have you ever giving reading our financial report a try? If you're not moved by numbers and finances, it is a daunting task. There is one primary, or general account, to which tons of smaller accounts are earmarked for spending: for instance, Morning Glories in and out funds, Property maintenance and contracts and utilities, Administration which is everything to do with the office- unless we need paper for Worship or Fast or Social Ministry. Besides the general account, we have three money generating accounts to hold funds for rainy days- our rainy days or our neighbors' rainy days. All in all, these accounts seem to be doing ok. There is a little over \$900,000 in them. But, some of the accounts are set-aside for very specific uses or they are being held to help others. So, we have a spending, or operating budget and then a reality of our full financial picture.

As our monthly report suggests, our membership does not support our operating budget. Therefore, I think I need to bring back an old word, I can't believe I'm saying this: Stewardship. Wait, how does stewardship tie to the message we just heard from Exodus? It seems a stretch- or does it?

In the Exodus journey, Moses had just come down from Mount Horeb with a

list of rules and regulations. No, that's not right. Moses had just gone up to receive 10 commandments from Yahweh in order for humanity to learn how to live. We, people of God, are to love God with our whole heart, mind, and soul. And, we are to love others as God loves us. Now, this love thing is tied to trust, faith, and absolute assurance. You know, all the things Yahweh has taught and shown us through words and actions thus far along this exodus journey.

Today's scene is a depiction of what we do as soon as it appears that God has taken a break from us. Interesting that the author uses God's voice to point out our actions. First, God says, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely..." Do we really believe that God sees the Israelites as Moses' offspring? No, God knows who the true Father or Mother of all people are. Do we really think that God forgot who led the people out of Egypt? No. Do you know that God just called the people "sihet"? The same name he used of all people of earth just before the flood of Noah's time. God called them perverse.

Next, God says, "Now let me alone so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them." Do we really believe God is a god of wrath who smites all un-conforming people? Do we really believe that our creator would ever have to consume us? No. Do you know that God just told Moses the same

thing God told Noah before the flood. In fact, the Hebrew word “noah” means rest. Do we really think God needs to go away and find rest from us? No. God is telling us what we do and what we think when we forget God.

When we forget God, all that God is, and all that God has done, and the promise of all that God will do, we become like the proverbial snake that swallows its own tail and eats itself. It’s not that we want to consume ourselves. It just appears that there is no other course of action. Perhaps the wrath of God is the gift of consciousness that leads us to compassion or if we fear wrong doing it leads to an all-consuming guilt. Perhaps the rest of God is the gift of sabbath where we can rejuvenate or where we can run circles in our minds driving ourselves mad.

Whatever it is, when we forget God, we think we have put our relationship with God in jeopardy. When that is our thought, we break-out the gold and silver and we craft idols and statues to praise. Soon, our bank accounts become the god of prosperity, our books and/or our cell phones become the god of relationships, our scientific labs become the gods of the future, and our minds and hearts become stiff-necked and hardened.

Forget God and our stewardship drives become about securing our church’s place in Catasauqua. We settle, erect our tent of meeting, and die in the wilderness never making it to the promise land. So, this year, let’s start our

stewardship drive where all drives begin. Go home. Thank God for all God has given you, ask God what you are to give back in return. Then, in the next few weeks, try to stay open to God nudges as God directs you in what is right.

Whatever the answer, if we start with God the drive will lead us to fresh pastures, cleaner water, and responsive living we cannot even begin to fathom. I can't make any promises but I truly believe if we start with God, our financial reports will become a blessing to read instead of a challenge to navigate. Thanks be to God.

Amen.