

When I was in second grade I did a speech for 4H titled, "Take a Hike." My talk encouraged people to get outside and gave them some safety tips for their time in the great outdoors: bring water, know how to use a map and hike with a partner. Moses, who lived about 3,300 years before my talk, didn't follow that important hiking rule. He set out up the mountain alone and after being gone 40 days and 40 nights the people feared the worst, that Moses is gone, so they say to Aaron, "Make *elohim* for us." Most English versions translate *elohim* as "gods," but it can also be translated as "God." Are the people asking Aaron to make them an image of a false god or a false image of the true God? The people want a God they can see and touch. God has appeared to them before: in the cloud and fire as they left Egypt (Exodus 13) and in the smoke, lightning and thunder on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19), but God has not been visible since then. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith is the conviction of things unseen," but in their request to Aaron the people reflect a deep human desire—they want to see God.

You have heard me say many times that we bring two basic questions to all of scripture: What does this tell us about God? and What does this tell us about us? This story of the Golden Calf tells us that we are quick to put things/people in the place of God. The people say, "Since Moses is gone we want to see God," and they say, "Moses is the one that brought them out of Egypt." But Moses didn't bring them out. Moses isn't God. The people are seeking to put something in place of God, and they have put Moses in the place of God saying Moses was the one that brought them out of Egypt.

Just ten chapters earlier in the book of Exodus God gave the people the Ten Commandments that say, "You shall have no other gods, you shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven or earth." The people of God in Moses day and today have a hard time keeping God as their God. We want to put things and people in the place of God. We put our trust in money or in one way of being church or in our own abilities. We make images of false gods and false images of the true God. In the Small Catechism Martin Luther says, our God is what ever we fear, love and trust. What do you fear? What do you love? What do you trust?

Must we fear, love and trust an unseen God? Or is it that the true God looks differently then the gods the world tells us to worship? That's what was happening to the Israelites. The Egyptians and the Canaanites both had a god in cow form. The true God looks different then the world tells us. What does scripture tell us?

In the section of Exodus that I read God sees what the people have done and God says to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stubborn they are. Now leave me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them." What does this tell us about God? What does it say that God has the capacity for rage. It is easy to think that wrath/anger is the opposite of grace, love and faithfulness but it isn't. The opposite of grace, love and faithfulness is indifference or ambivalence. God isn't indifferent. God is faithful and just. God's anger comes as a result of injustice. God is always faithful and just. We as Lutherans focus on God's faithfulness and God is always faithful but God is also always just.

In North Dakota on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, South of Bismarck, there is a group gathered to protect water. A company wants to build an oil pipeline that would run under the Missouri River just north of the Reservation, just north of where they get their water. Originally the river crossing for the pipeline was north of Bismarck but the people living there forced the crossing to change. It makes me wonder if the safety of the pipeline isn't good enough for white people in Bismarck then why would we think it good enough for the Native Americans living on the reservation?

There is a story about a ruler that comes to the Buddha asking for the secret to being a good ruler. And Buddha responds, "justice." The man acknowledges, "Yes, I want justice." Buddha stands up and walks down to the river, the ruler follows. At the river Buddha grabs the ruler by his neck, walks out into the water and plunges his head under. The Buddha holds the ruler's head under for a minute, with him kicking and struggling to get free. Finally Buddha pulled him up out of the water. The young man came up coughing and gasped to get his breath, eventually he quieted and Buddha asked him, "What did you want most when you were under water?" "Air!" answered the young ruler. Buddha replied, "You must desire justice as much as you wanted air."

What does Exodus 32 tell us about God? Where do we look for the true God active in our world? Where ever there is injustice God is there. In police shootings and stabbings, God is there. At Black Lives Matter and on Reservations, God is there. When children don't have quality child care just because their parents can't afford it,

God is there. Hebrews 11 says, "faith is the conviction of things unseen," but we want to see God, so the Bible tells us where to look. Where ever there is injustice God is there working and God is calling us and working through us, to end racism and extremism, to care for the least and the lost.

Micah 6:8 asks, "What does the Lord requires of you?" Then it answers, "Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God." God is faithful and just. God will always be with us. Even in God's righteous indignation is God's faithfulness. God never leaves us, even when we are not getting it, even when we are participating in injustice God remains with us... calling us out into the world. What is God calling you to?

As a congregation we have been asking this question and the more we discern, Bloom Early Learning and Child Care looks to be the answer. Bloom has 50% of their children on scholarship. Excellent care and education for all of the kids they serve- including children who's families could never afford it. I ask you to pray. Pray for Bloom and the important work they do. And pray for Peace, pray for us, that we would be open to what God is calling. That we would participate in God's faithfulness and justice.