

Exodus 32:15-29

Pentecost 6; July 12, 2020

I don't think that I will ever forget the sight. Four years ago, Nancy and I made a trip to Alaska. It was one of those bucket list things that we did for our 30th Wedding Anniversary. While we were there, we saw Mt. Denali, the tallest mountain in all of North America. For many who travel to see that mountain, only about 30% are able to see. Not only did we see one day, we saw it for two days in a row. While we there, we took a side trip to fly around Denali. Then not only did we see it from the air, but we landed on a glacier. The skies were clear blue, as we stood on that mountain looking at the mountain's peak. *How could you not remember the sight?*

About 3,500 years ago, a group of people stood on the base of another mountain – Mount Sinai. They saw a sight that doesn't even compare to Mount Denali. God had delivered the children of Israel from Egypt. Three months later, they had arrived at Mount Sinai. It was there on that mountain that God spoke his commandments to Moses and Aaron. Moses returned from the mountain, and told the people what God had said. Their response was simple: **"Everything the Lord has said we will do."** (Exodus 24:3)

Then God gives an incredible invitation. He invites Moses and Aaron and the seventy elders to join him on the mountain for dinner. Moses describes it this way: **"the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank."** (Exodus 24:9-10) I can't even imagine what they saw that day on Mount Sinai. *How could they not remember such a sight?*

The children of Israel had seen some pretty amazing sights from their God. Three months ago they had witnessed God's amazing power, as he sent the ten plagues upon the nation of Egypt. They felt freedom when God led them out of the land of Egypt on their way to the land of Canaan, which he promised to give them. They saw God's protection circled around the people when the Egyptian army drowned in the Red Sea trying to pursue the people. Then after they arrive at Mount Sinai, 70+ get to have dinner with God on the side of a mountain. *How could they not remember such a sight?*

Then God invites Moses and Joshua to come up to the top of the mountain. But this was no ordinary hike to the top of a mountain. Moses later would describe it this way: **"To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain."** They had dinner with God and then Moses and Joshua go up the mountain and walk into a burning ball of fire. *How could they not remember such a sight?*

Then the waiting began to see if Moses would come out of that ball of fire. The fire on that mountain lasted 6 days. Days turned into weeks. Weeks turned into a month and a half. Still no Moses. They had seen firsthand the miracles that God could do. Instead of giving thanks to God, they find themselves growing impatient. They grew tired waiting for Moses to return. They grew impatient with God himself. So, what do they do? They approach Aaron with a simple request: **"When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'"** (Exodus 32:1) They wanted a god who would do things their way. So, Aaron asks them to bring their gold, and he will make a golden calf to worship. They do. He makes them a god. *How could they not remember such a sight of their God that they had seen only 40 days before?*

How could they do that? They had seen sights that we can only imagine from God. They had God tell them what he wanted them to do. They can't even get past the 1st commandment. Really? But before we might get too judgmental of them, maybe we can understand them more that we care to admit. How many golden calves do we have in our lives? How many times do we put something or someone else above God? They wanted a God who would do what they wanted him to do and when they wanted him to act. They grew tired of God's timing. Do we ever grow tired of waiting for God's timing? *How could they not remember such a sight?*

Then Moses and Joshua come down the mountain. What do they see? They see people who had forgotten the sight of their God. They see them acting like animals in front of a golden calf. They saw a nation who gave into evil. Both God and Moses could not forget such a sight. Moses confronts Aaron. Then Aaron makes one of the most ridiculous excuses

found in the pages of the Bible. **“Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”** Aaron tried to make excuses. But Moses didn’t buy it for a moment. He looks at Aaron and almost says: *How could you not remember what your God can do?*

“And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.” It’s almost as if Moses is saying to the people: *Look how powerful your god is now? Look how easy it is for me to destroy him. Take and drink your god and see how awful your god tastes.* Then the Levites strap on their swords and make the way through the camp and killed 3,000 Israelites that day. *Now they saw a righteous God who cannot tolerate sin.*

Yet, in this account we can see God’s incredible grace. You see God did not kill them all. He could have, but he chose not to do that. God would be faithful to his promise and he still continued to show his grace upon his people. In the verses just after our reading this morning, Moses says to God: **“Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin.”** There would be consequences to their sin. They would be punished, but not destroyed. But there was one who was coming that would take all the punishment for sin so that we would not be destroyed. That someone is Jesus. With that blood, our sins are forgiven. You see this is the God we love. This is a God that desires us to love him with all our heart. You see God also wants you to see his incredible grace that day below Mount Sinai. May God help all of us to love him with all our heart. Amen.