

“Another Fall”

September 14, 2025

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Exodus 32: 7-14

God has been hard at work on behalf of God’s people. The book of Exodus begins with God’s people enslaved in Egypt. God hears their prayers and against all odds, raises up a leader in a man named Moses. With Moses as God’s liaison, God brings the most powerful nation in the world to its knees and makes Egypt give up its slaves. God leads those former slaves out of Egypt, across the Red Sea on dry land, and brings them to the place God and Moses first talked – the holy ground of Mt. Sinia. The people are asking what they can do to say thank you to God for freeing them from slavery and allowing them to walk out of Egypt with all the gold jewelry they could carry. The people gather at the base of the mountain, and God comes to the people with smoke, fire, and lighting. The earth shakes as God answers them directly. God says, out of all the nations of the world, you are My “treasured possession”, “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation”. You are special. Then God shares with them what they need to do to be that special nation – free and grateful. What God shared is the 10 Commandments starting with “You shall have no other gods before Me” then moving straight into “You shall not make for yourself an idol to bow down and worship.” The people hear the voice of God and proclaim, “Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.” Just don’t expose us to the immediate presence of God again. It is too much. We will die. They say, “Moses, you go to God and tell us what God says, and we will do it.” So Moses takes his young prodigy Joshua and heads up the mountain to meet with God while Moses’ brother Aaron and the other elders go back with the people. While on the mountain, God gives Moses tablets with the 10 Commandments written on them. God shares very detailed plans for the “Ark of the Covenant” which will symbolize God’s presence with the people, and the tabernacle or tent that will house the Ark. God gives instructions on how to honor God, how to acknowledge God’s presence with them, God’s closeness; while also maintaining God’s transcendence, bigness, mystery and holy wonder. God will not be dumbed-down to something they can understand and control.

The problem is, this takes a while – over a month. The people have moved from being led by God’s pillar of smoke by day and pillar of fire by night with Moses to interpret along the way, to no signs from God and no sign of Moses. Both the pillars of smoke and fire as well as Moses are on top of the mountain. They began to feel lost and abandoned. They needed leadership. They went to Moses’ second in command, his brother Aaron, wanting to see God, to see God lead them again. Starting in verse 2 of our chapter, “Aaron said to them, ‘Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring them to me.’ So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took these from them, formed them in a mold, and cast an image of a calf, and they said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar

before it, and Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord.' I want to pause a moment to put this together, -God just spent 7 chapters, over a month's time, working with Moses to maintain this delicate balance of God's closeness and God's completely otherness – God being intimately with them, but remaining invisible, intangible, unwilling to be dumbed down to what we can envision and control; and then Aaron makes a cow and says "here is your God." The powerful, moving, freeing, interactive God who brought plagues upon the Egyptians, earned Israel's freedom, parted the Red, and spoke to them from the mountain; is now an object that cannot hear or speak and must be carried from one place to another. God is not happy.

Starting in verse 7 then skipping to 10, "The Lord said to Moses, 'Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely... Now let me alone so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, and of you I will make a great nation.'" They have already broken the first 2 commandments that God spoke to them from the mountain – commandments they said they would obey forever. It is the Garden of Eden and the Fall all over again. God gave life and paradise to Adam and Eve and they responded by eating the forbidden fruit. God saved Noah and his family from the earth destroying flood, then Noah's son makes a violent power play to take control. God chooses Abraham and Sarah and gives them land, wealth, influence, and the promise of descendants; and Abraham has a son with a slave girl because God wasn't working according to Abraham's timetable. God sends visions of prosperity to Joseph, and his brothers sell him into slavery out of jealousy. Every time God establishes a new relationship with God's people, they want to change positions and be God. It is the Fall of Genesis 3 all over again. But God hoped this time it would be different. After freeing them from generations of slavery, teaching them how to be a thankful people, and how to never again be subjected to slavery, God thought they might be ready. But no, they still choose their way over God's way, and demand God serve them on their terms.

God is ready to be done with them and simply erase them. But Moses wouldn't leave God alone. God said, "Now let me alone so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, and of you I will make a great nation.'" But Moses wouldn't leave. We always hear about God not leaving us. We adore the "Footprints" poem that ends:

"Lord, You said that once I decided to follow you,
You'd walk with me all the way.

But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of
footprints.

I don't understand why, when I needed you most,
you would leave me."

The Lord replied,

"My precious child, I love you and I would never leave you.

During your times of trial and suffering,
when you see only one set of footprints,
it was then that I carried You."

We cherish the reality that God will never leave us, but can you turn that around? Moses refused to leave God. God said, "Now let me alone so that my wrath may burn hot against them," but Moses refused to leave. Moses stayed. I think about how many people pray to God, but God doesn't answer their prayer on their timeframe, how they wanted, so they leave. How many times people have a difference of opinion with someone at church or even a fight, and they leave church. Not just that church, but Church. They leave God. How many times they just don't feel comfortable – like that is the definition of truth – so they leave. They leave worship. They leave prayer. They leave study. They leave God. But Moses stayed. Moses refused to leave and continued to talk with God.

Moses said just because they are saying it was me that brought them out of Egypt, doesn't make it true. You and I both know it was You. And besides, what will people say about You if You bring these people out of Egypt just to wipe them out? Now they see You as the One who brought the most powerful nation in the world to its knees, but how will people see You if You drop them now? And besides, You promised. You swore an oath to Abraham, Issaac, and Jacob that their descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky. These are their descendants, the people you promised to take to the new place – the promise land. You promised. God, be defined by who You are – the promises You make and keep – not by the circumstances that surround You. And with that, v. 14, "the Lord changed His mind about the disaster that He planned to bring on His people."

We count on God being true to God's word even when we are not true to ours. And God proved God's determination to keep His promises not only here, but when we hung Jesus on the cross. Instead of responding with anger and violence, Jesus said, "forgiven them, for they do not know what they are doing." We count on God keeping God's promises because of who God is, not because of who we are. And God keeps God's promises, but don't stop reading too soon. There were significant consequences for breaking the first 2 Commandments and angering God – thousands of rebellious individuals die by the sword, and a plague comes to devastate even more, but the people as a whole were not destroyed.

Moses' words to God are pretty good words for us too. Just because people say things about you, doesn't make it true. You and God know the truth. 2. You may be responding to them, but it is your reputation at stake. Guard your reputation. 3. Your promise, your word means something. It is not reliant on anything or anyone else. It is your word. It still shakes my hope for people, when I was doing some research on adultery, the LA Intelligence Detective Agency said 74% of men and 68% of women admit they would cheat on their spouse if it was guaranteed they'd never get caught. Almost ¾ of Americans admit their word, the promise they

made to their God and their spouse, means nothing. The only thing that matters is if you get caught. Well I for one made promises when I got married, and I made promises when I became a parent, and I made promises when I was baptized, and they matter regardless of if I can get away with it. I've broken promises too. Sometimes we make stupid vows that keep us from being who God calls us to be, and they need to be broken. And sometimes we make good promises made in good faith, and have to rely on the forgiveness of God and others for healing, but your integrity, keeping your promises matters. I know too many people who have lost their Godly witness because they lost their integrity. Moses' words to God are pretty good words for us too: 1. Just because people say things about you, does not make it true. You and God know the truth. 2. You may be responding to them, but it is your reputation at stake. Guard your reputation. 3. Keeping your promises makes you trustworthy and worth listening to. The words are good words, and he was able to share them because he stayed and would not leave God. May it be so for you and for me.

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