

# “The Gift of Dialogue”

Exodus 32:1-14

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October 15, 2023

From the Pulpit

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Exodus 32:1-14

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*Let us pray: O God of All People,  
we thank You for the gift of coming together as one people to reflect on  
Your Word. And, O dear God, may the words that I have to offer here,  
this morning, please You and honor You and glorify Your holy name. In  
Jesus’ sweet name, we pray, Amen!*

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This morning, I want to begin by acknowledging that this has been an **especially** difficult and troubling week – for all of us – and for our global community – as we all try to process our feelings and respond to the news of the horrific events currently taking place in the Middle East.

*And, it is important to remember that* in upsetting and confusing and overwhelming times like these, we are called to turn TOWARD one another for conversation and companionship and support – as we figure out, together, how to respond to the suffering of the people of Israel *and* Palestine today.

As I was preparing for this sermon – and wrestling with this familiar passage from Exodus 32 – while *also* trying to make sense of the tumultuous news of the world this week – I remembered some words of wisdom of one of my homiletics professors in seminary, Dr. Langknecht, who would remind us that:

the trouble in the text that we read reminds us of the trouble in the world today –

AND the hope in the text inspires us to recognize the hope in the world today.

I believe that I've shared these words with you before, but I find these words of wisdom to be especially encouraging in times like these, and certainly during this past week as we have all been reacting to the events and images on our screens.

*The trouble in the text speaks to the trouble in the world just as the hope in the text points us to the hope in the world today!*

So then, let us now turn to our text for today from the Old Testament Book of Exodus.

Now, this is a familiar passage which is often referred to as the “story of the golden calf.” However, this scene that we encounter, here, in chapter 32, is really the continuation of a story that began eight chapters earlier, back in Exodus 24, when Moses left the people and headed up the mountain in order to receive the Ten Commandments from God.

Now, as Moses was leaving to go up the mountain, he tells the elders to wait for him – and he also instructs them – that if there were a dispute among the people, then they were to consult with Aaron and Hur (Exodus 24:14).

And so, for the next forty days and forty nights, Moses was away from the people while God and he were deep into the details about all kinds of plans and concerns regarding the construction of the tabernacle and the requirements for ordination in the priesthood and so on and so forth.

But now, here, in chapter 32, what we discover is that in this prolonged absence of their faithful and trusted leader, Moses, the people are now getting

anxious – and they’re worrying about their future – and they are losing faith – and they are starting to act out!

And do you remember what they said to their then-*interim* leader, Aaron, at that point?? They said, “As for this Moses, that man who brought us out of Egypt, well, we just don’t know what has become of him.”

Now, first of all, it is **significant** that in this text, the people give credit to Moses, and **not** God, for their liberation.

And so, in this scene, without that grounding in the promises and the presence of God, we discover that the people of God have now **lost** their faith – and they are now pressuring Aaron by demanding: “Come make gods for us who shall go before us!”

And what does Aaron do?

Well, under Aaron’s leadership – during this transitional time – while Moses is absent – it gets worse!

Rather than remaining steadfast in his faith, Aaron gives in to the demands of the people. And he ordered them to collect all the gold in their possession so that they could use it to create a golden calf for worship!

What was Aaron thinking?!

Was this just a temporary lapse in judgment? A momentary loss of faith? Was Aaron a people pleaser? Was he **reacting** – rather than **responding** – to the overall anxiety levels of the people that had apparently sky-rocketed during Moses’ absence?

Clearly, Aaron compromised his own theology so as not to upset the people!

Now, as if this story from Exodus – so far – is not *discomforting* enough – it then takes another surprise turn – when we read of God’s impassioned

response and anger *toward* the people due to their idolatry and faithlessness and bad behavior!

And how does Moses respond to God's reaction?

Well, while acknowledging God's strong feelings, Moses is also able to engage God in dialogue – even in this moment of God's anger – while also offering a broader and an historical perspective by recalling the promises that God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Israel.

And in this *holy* moment, in this *dialogue* – this back and forth – between Moses and God, Moses is earnest and thoughtful and responsive, *and* it turns out that he is able to **deescalate the crisis** at hand.

And what is God's response to Moses?

Well, in verse 14, we read: *And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.*

**God was able to truly hear Moses.**

**And it turned out that God changed God's own mind.**

Even though this is a familiar text to me – and even though I've preached on it before – it hadn't ever occurred to me – until very recently – that **this** conversation between God and Moses offers us an example of a dialogue!

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Several years ago, early on in my training to become a spiritual director, I remember learning the difference between the terms, **discussion** and **dialogue**.

One of the books that we read that first semester was: *Practicing the Sacred Art of Listening* by Kay Lindhal who is the founder of an organization called The Listening Center.

In this book, Lindhal explains that the word, *discussion*, comes from the Latin roots *dis* (meaning *apart*) and *quatare* (meaning to *shake*). So, in other words, a *discussion* is an analysis or a search for an answer. It is done in the spirit of looking for results. On the other hand, the term, *dialogue*, comes from the Greek words, *dia*, meaning *through*, and *logos* which is translated as *meaning* or *word*. So, the term, *dialogue*, is a flow of meaning through words in which new understandings emerge that might not have been present before. Dialogues are done in the spirit of inquiry or wanting to know.

And so, I wonder:

Where, in *your* life, is there room for **more** dialogue? That desire to seek understanding *and* to be understood?

How do YOU practice dialogue with family members or friends?

Within your neighborhood?

And in our life together as First Church?

Where is dialogue most needed within our wider community, and across our state and throughout our nation?

And how, O God, how can we encourage dialogue – *and diplomacy* – within our **global** community – and in the midst of our warring ways?

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I'd like to close this morning with some words of wisdom from Malala Yousafzai who, you may remember, is the Pakistani activist for female education and the world's youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate, just seventeen at the time.

Malala Yousafzai once said:

*The best way to solve problems and to fight against war is through dialogue.*

*Thanks be to God, amen!*

