

## Exodus 32:1-14

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>When the people saw that Moses **DELAYED** to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. <sup>4</sup> He took the gold from them, formed it 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!" <sup>5</sup> When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be *a festival to the Lord*." <sup>6</sup> They rose early the next day, and offered burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.

<sup>7</sup> The Lord said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; <sup>8</sup> they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an **image of a calf**, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" <sup>9</sup> The Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how **stiff-necked** they are. <sup>10</sup> 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*."

<sup>11</sup> But Moses **IMPLORED** the Lord his God, and said, "O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. <sup>13</sup> **Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel**, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" <sup>14</sup> **And the Lord changed his mind** about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

This book of the Exodus tells the story of the life and leadership of Moses who transformed by an encounter with God, leads the Israelites from their generations-old enslavement in Egypt to freedom. The latter half of the book tells the story of the exodus journey, once freed physically how the people struggle to become free from a different bondage, an enslavement to fear of the unknown, the security of the familiar and the all-too-quick movement to idolatrous rejection of the God who delivered them from their chains of slavery. The story is the primary articulation of Jewish identity, but is also the story of the human condition from which God longs to deliver us, and the exodus from sin in which Jesus of Nazareth leads us forward through his life and death.

Today's selection tells of how quickly the Israelites lose faith and hope when Moses is delayed in his absence to receive the 10 commandments. His brother, Aaron, is their "interim pastor." In their fear and narcissism they quickly abandon the God they know for the gods of whom the Egyptians told them. This story of idolatry as the human condition is told again and again in the Bible, from the garden in Genesis 2 up and through the life of Jesus.

**DELAYED** :: this word is used only twice in the Hebrew Scriptures, here and also in Judges 5:28 in which they delay of the return of husbands in war is actually their death and defeat. In Exodus 4:1 Moses asks if the people will listen and believe him. At times they do (4:30-31; 14:31) and at others they clearly don't (here, 6:1-9, 14:10-12; 17:7). The story of Exodus presents them as fickle, bickering, anxious: longing for the easy, comfortable and familiar as opposed to a life of trust, hope and belief in something better.

Moses, the man who brought us up :: the Israelites seem to co-mingle their trust in Moses, the messenger of Yahweh, with their trust in Yahweh. They've made Yahweh into an impersonal God, of whom they're afraid, who they approach only through an intermediary even though they were freed to know and serve Yahweh directly [Exodus 3:8]. Could the image they create be to re-present Moses in his absence?

**an image of a calf**: Some scholars see the image [or idol] of a calf as harkening back to the Egyptian god Apis and/or the Canaanite god Baal both of whom were represented symbolically by the image of a bull. Curiously, in the one image they see the symbol of the plural gods of Egypt. And Aaron talks not of the worship of Egyptian deities but of *a festival to the Lord* [Yahweh]. Are they worshipping foreign idols, or creating a syncretistic worship of both gods?

*of you I will make a great nation* : although angry over the Israelites' disloyalty, Yahweh paradoxically reaffirms to Moses the promise God first made to Abraham [and Sarah] in Genesis 12:2 "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." God leaves the door open into which Moses **IMPLORES** through intercession, somehow changing God's mind and judgment.

## Matthew 5:1-11

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup>Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

<sup>3</sup>“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup>“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup>“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup>“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup>“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup>“Blessed are **THE PURE IN HEART**, for they will *see* God.

<sup>9</sup>“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup>“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup>“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

AS WE SEE IN THESE TEXTS YAHWEH DESIRES TO BE KNOWN. OUR HUMAN CONDITION OFTEN LEADS US TO LOOK ELSEWHERE IN OUR DESIRE TO SEE GOD. SOMETIMES TO OUR OWN SELVES AND POWER, SOMETIMES TO OTHER PEOPLE, POWERS OR THINGS. TO WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR YOUR SENSE OF IDENTITY, PURPOSE AND PASSION MOST OFTEN?

WE AFFIRM THAT GOD IS BOTH UNKNOWABLE AND KNOWABLE, INFINITELY FAR FROM US AND IMPOSSIBLY CLOSE, BOTH TRANSCENDENT AND IMMANENT. HOW AND WHERE HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THAT PARADOX OF GOD’S NATURE? AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS, WE AFFIRM WITH THOSE WHO HAVE WALKED AND LIVED BEFORE US IN FAITH, THAT JESUS IS THE VISIBLE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD [COLOSSIANS 1:15]. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR YOU TODAY IN YOUR DAILY LIFE?

HOW ARE YOU LED ASTRAY, LOOKING FOR GOD IN IDOLS OF YOUR OWN MAKING OR CREATED BY OUR SOCIETAL SYSTEMS? TALK WITH GOD ABOUT YOUR OWN DECEPTION, DISLOYALTY OR DISOBEDIENCE. TELL GOD OF THE FREEDOM YOU LONG TO KNOW, THE WAYS IN WHICH YOU WHICH TO SEE.

**Matthew**, along with the gospel called Luke, are commonly thought to have been written from Mark’s gospel account and adapted to better address the characteristics of the church communities to for which it was recorded. Matthew is likely written to the church located in what we now call Syria & Lebanon, one that was heavily influenced by Jewish culture and belief. This teaching, commonly called the Beatitudes is at the center of Matthew’s retelling of the gospel, it’s the constitution or summary of all that Jesus taught. Matthew presents it as both a new teaching and faithful re-interpretation of the Jewish Torah or law, less a new way of approaching God than a fulfilling or perfecting of the Torah.

**THE PURE IN HEART** : The Greek word for “**PURE**” is *katharos*. It means to be “clean, blameless, unstained from guilt.” Interestingly, the word can refer specifically to that which is purified by fire or by pruning. John the Baptist told people that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11). Malachi speaks of the Messiah as being like a “refiner’s fire” (Malachi 3:2). Jesus refers to believers as being the branches and to Himself as being the vine (John 15:1-17). For a vine to produce fruit, it must be pruned.

The implication then is that those who are “pure,” are those who seek a purification, a pruning, a new way of seeing, a clear purpose other than the one they’ve known.

The Greek word for “**HEART**” is *kardeeah*. This can be applied to the physical heart. But it also refers to the spiritual center of life. It is where thoughts, desires, sense of purpose, will, understanding, and character reside. It’s as much biological as existential, not limited to an organ but inclusive of our entire identity.

Being pure in heart then involves having a singleness of heart toward God, a clarity of purpose, passion and perspective. Those who have it seek to know God, follow God, serve God; to which Jesus promises that they will see God.

*see* :: in Greek the word is ὄψονταί [opsontai]: 1) to look at, behold and 2) to allow one's self to be seen, to appear. It implies more than mere visible sight, reaching to include a relational knowing, an existential beholding, a dynamic of exchange not just a passive observation.