

Grace, Mercy, and Peace are yours from God our Heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

[Digging My Hole]

It was another road trip during the summer. Rachel and I were driving an old car with no air conditioner in the middle of the summer. We would stop at gas stations every other hour or so and grab a slushie or some iced coffee as a supplement for air conditioning. Anything, just to stay cool. Then it happened! Just a bit outside of the gas station we had a little spill. In hindsight, it wasn't anything too terrible or unmanageable. For some reason though, the sun, the heat, or the lack of A/C, the temptation to give into anger was too great. In total anger and frustration, I threw the phone I had been using to navigate to communicate my frustration. My message was received loud and clear when I realized I had hit the other slushie that was in the cup holder, digging myself into a deep hole. Rachel lovingly blurted out, “What *were* you thinking!?”

That was the problem. I wasn't. I wasn't thinking! My mind took a wrong turn and now I was stuck in a big hole. Aaron knows. Oh my! Aaron, Moses's older brother, he knows what it feels like to be stuck in a big hole he can't get out of.

[Right Now!]

The golden calf episode in Exodus 32 is sandwiched between God's instructions to Moses about the tabernacle (Ex 25-31) and the tabernacle's construction (Ex 35-40).

Then the crisis starts. “When the people saw how long it was taking Moses to come back down the mountain, they gathered around Aaron. ‘Come on,’ they said, ‘make us some gods who can lead us. We don't know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt’” (Ex 32:1). Moses had been on the top of Mt. Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. People were getting impatient.

“How long?”

You and I know the feeling. We see how long it takes to get through school. We see how long it takes to build a marriage. We see how long it takes to raise children. We see how long it takes to save money. We don't like a God who makes us wait.

We want a god who can satisfy right now!

That's what Aaron offers. "'Take the gold rings from the ears of your wives and sons and daughters, and bring them to me.' All the people took the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. Then Aaron took the gold, melted it down, and molded it into the shape of a calf" (Ex 32:2-4). Aaron offers a god who can satisfy right now! And with that, Aaron has made a mess. Next comes the temptation.

[Temptation]

"Aaron saw how excited the people were, so he built an altar in front of the calf. Then he announced, 'Tomorrow will be a festival to the LORD!'" (Ex 32:5). Aaron makes a stunning claim. Aaron calls the calf "the LORD." Really? The calf is the LORD?

How often do we exchange the real God for a fake god and then claim that the fake god is the real God?

Answer. We do this too often. We do this far too often! What are the top fake gods in America? Money, sports, and jobs. Money, sports, and jobs promise everything. In the end money, sports, and job deliver nothing.

Aaron makes a mess for himself.

Aaron is tempted.

Finally, Aaron takes what was a small mess and digs himself into a hole!

And what would that be?

"The people celebrated with feasting and drinking, and indulged in pagan revelry" (Ex 32:6). Pagan revelry means "sexual immorality." When Paul reflects on Exodus 32 in 1 Corinthians 10:8 that's what he calls it: sexual immorality.

[The Commandment: Broken]

It starts out just like Aaron. You and I get impatient. “How long!” We make a mess. We get tempted. But then we can make it much worse. How so? We disregard the first commandment. “You shall have no other Gods”

You and I turn towards these false gods and we offer them the best of what we have. Jobs take priority over our spouses and our family. Sports teams take up the role of identity in our lives. You and I have probably heard people in our lives proudly declare, “I’m a Hawkeye!” but they won’t even dare to whisper, “I’m also a Christian...” Money devours our desires as people seek more and more to provide for the leisure they want.

Whether you and I mean to or not, there is such a great temptation to give into these “gods”. To make them a place of security and love in your life. To place them above family and friends. However, this doesn’t compare to the temptation to place these smaller gods, willingly, over the God who saves us. The God who has chosen us, who shows us Hospitality in welcoming us into the body of Christ.

In Exodus 32:21, 30, 31 Moses calls Israel’s sexual immorality a great sin. It’s a great sin because of who committed it Aaron, the high priest, and the Israelites, God’s chosen people. It’s a great sin because of where they committed it on Mount Sinai, God’s holy mountain. It’s a great sin because of when they committed it right after God delivered them from Egypt with a mighty hand and outstretched arm. If I were Moses, I’d wash my hands of the whole mess. But Moses doesn’t do that. Moses doesn’t do that at all!

[The Covenant: Consistent]

Moses prays, “Turn away from your fierce anger. Change your mind about this terrible disaster you have threatened against your people! Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel” (Ex 32:12-13).

When you are in a giant mess, an awful explosion, claim the covenant! What covenant? God’s covenant with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.

And guess what happens?

“The LORD changed his mind about the terrible disaster he had threatened to bring on his people” (Ex 32:14). The covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel is an everlasting covenant sealed in blood that’s what Genesis 15:10 tells us. Sin can’t break this covenant. Idolatry can’t nullify it. Death can’t defeat it. And a huge explosion can’t destroy it.

The covenant that God cut with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel? It’s fulfilled in the death of Jesus.

God’s covenant promises are sealed forever in Jesus’s blood, shed on the cross, for you. The covenant blood of Jesus announces that God is *always* loving.

God is *always* kind.

God is *always* forgiving.

God is *always* abounding in grace and mercy.

You and I have had big messes before. We have all built golden calves. We have all worshiped other gods. We have all known the hell of the hole. I don’t care how deep our hole is, we’re not stuck. We are not stuck in a hellhole forever! What can we do? We can do what Moses did.

Claim the covenant.

Claim Christ’s new covenant promises delivered to us in his cleansing, powerful, and renewing blood.

So Be it.

Amen.

As followers of Christ, “Keep loving one another earnestly
And show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” AMEN! (1Pt 4:8-9)
