



'Worship at home' Sunday October 15th 2023



We come to worship God,
who we find in the holy spaces
and the ordinary places of our lives,
sometimes in unexpected ways.

***Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD,
for he is good; his love endures forever.*** *Psalm 106:1*

We come to worship today to praise the Lord and give thanks for God's goodness and love, which are beyond all comprehension and imagining.



*There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea,
and forgiveness in his justice
sealed for us on Calvary.*

*For the love of God is broader
than the measure of our mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.*

*But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own,
and we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own.*

*Together in Song 136
Frederick William Faber 1814-63 alt.*

This Scripture story comes from the time of the ancient Israelites. After Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt, they spent some time wandering in the desert, not really knowing where they were going or how long it might take. They became tired and quarrelsome with each other. The giving of the Ten Commandments gave some boundaries and guidelines to remind them how to live in good relationship with each other, and with God, in love. However, they quickly forgot those ways, and became restless again.

Exodus 32:1-14

When the people saw that Moses had not come down from the mountain but was staying there a long time, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, "We do not know what has happened to this man Moses, who led us out of Egypt; so make us a god to lead us." Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold earrings which your wives, your sons, and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." So all the people took off their gold earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took the earrings, melted them, poured the gold into a mold, and made a gold bull-calf. The people said, "Israel, this is our god, who led us out of Egypt!" Then Aaron built an altar in front of the gold bull-calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to honor the Lord." Early the next morning they brought some animals to burn as sacrifices and others to eat as fellowship offerings. The people sat down to a feast, which turned into an orgy of drinking and sex. The Lord said to Moses, "Hurry and go back down, because your people, whom you led out of Egypt, have sinned and rejected me. They have already left the way that I commanded them to

follow; they have made a bull-calf out of melted gold and have worshiped it and offered sacrifices to it. They are saying that this is their god, who led them out of Egypt. I know how stubborn these people are. Now, don't try to stop me. I am angry with them, and I am going to destroy them. Then I will make you and your descendants into a great nation."

But Moses pleaded with the Lord his God and said, "Lord, why should you be so angry with your people, whom you rescued from Egypt with great might and power? Why should the Egyptians be able to say that you led your people out of Egypt, planning to kill them in the mountains and destroy them completely? Stop being angry; change your mind and do not bring this disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Remember the solemn promise you made to them to give them as many descendants as there are stars in the sky and to give their descendants all that land you promised would be their possession forever." So the Lord changed his mind and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

The Israelites grew impatient while Moses was up the mountain. Moses had led them out of Egypt; through Moses God had provided them with food and water; Moses had been the spokesperson for God's covenant with them. Moses was a physical reminder of God's presence with them, and without him, they felt lost and uncertain.



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Worship of the bull was widespread in ancient Canaan and the surrounding country, and a golden calf would have been a familiar image to the Israelites. When Moses did not reappear, the people wished for something tangible to remind them of God. They asked Aaron to make them a physical representation of the Lord. They saw the calf as a comforting presence at a time when they felt God to be far away.

**Have there been times when you have felt far from God?
What has helped you find comfort
and the assurance of God's presence?**

Sometimes we too get impatient as we seek signs of God's presence. In our own desert times, when we feel vulnerable, lost and separated from God or others, it might feel comforting to have a golden calf as a physical reminder of God's promise to care for us, sustain us and guide us. We find assurances of God's presence in the beauty of nature, in the touch of a friend, in an uplifting worship song, and in the promises of Scripture. All of these things are important, and God is all of this... and more! However, we risk confining God to what we can touch and see and know. We limit God to our own human knowledge and experience. We try to contain God in the shape of a calf, or other symbolic representation, which feels known and comfortable.

God is indescribable and uncontainable. We cannot limit God to a sunset, the friend next door...or a golden calf. God is above all and in all and through all, far beyond our imagining.

***To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for,
to be certain of the things we cannot see. Hebrews 11:1 3***

Sometimes faith requires us to not go seeking aids and props and assurances of God's presence, but to simply trust. When we feel we are wandering in the wilderness, lost and alone, we trust that God is with us. Even when we feel there is nothing to see, nothing to feel, nothing to hold on to, God is faithful; God's promises are trustworthy, and God will lead us, keep us, and sustain us in our journeys.

What do you place your trust in?

What gives you security and safety in your life?

We sometimes find it easy to focus on what is immediate and tangible. We become impatient with God's timetable, and seek to fulfill our needs ourselves, wanting independence, power and control. Where we spend our money, our time, our efforts, might be an indication of what we really place our trust in.

"A job provides security. A house promises comfort. A portfolio provides protection. A relationship provides safety. A position in the community provides power. A car promises prestige. These can be our golden calves." Barbara Brown Taylor: *Gospel Medicine*

These priorities are not necessarily damaging of themselves. However, when we rely on these things, we do not rely on God. God's love and faithfulness goes far beyond that which is immediate and tangible. This Scripture invites us to abide in the grace of our mysterious and indescribable God of infinite love, whose ways are far beyond our imagining.

Closing prayer

Mysterious God, you are indescribable and uncontainable. Your love is immense, and your ways far beyond our imagining. Yet you are our God, you are with us, you are constant. Keep us living in your truth and following your ways. Although we cannot see you in physical form, others can see your love in us. Prompt us to be the image of Christ to those around us, bringing comfort, encouragement and hope to others. We pray that all people might know your presence and your peace. Amen.

