

## WELCOME 13<sup>th</sup> August 2023 – 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost '23 A

Exodus 32:1-33:3

**Welcome!** It's great to be together again today! Pastor John is closer to "back"...still a bit to go...but not long. God's hard at work! In the meantime... **Growing Praise inserts & this week a different kind of Bible Study Group Learning & Reminders** are included. That means you're going to need to "take notes" **DURING** the Sermon so you get some of the discussion starters for your later use. **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups will restart THIS WEEK. Friday 1pm**  
**As we move into this week...**

**Return** for a full refund – "No fault" divorce – contractual "escape" clauses – We look for all sorts of ways to change our minds at no cost & move on to something we think is "better." Whether it's a better pair of shoes or a "better" spouse or a better deal we'll trade what we have for what we think is better at the blink of an eye.

That's the human story from the moment Adam/Eve traded the fullness of the garden for the knowledge that they were naked. We too are regularly presented w/ promises that seem more attractive, more immediate & more tangibly rewarding than the promises of God. But only God & His promises lead us on the journey to fullness of life w/ Him both now & for all eternity.

And in the midst of fickle human hearts God never relents on his promise to bless his people... **The Lord said to Moses, "Get going, you & the people you brought up from the land of Egypt. Go up to the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob. I told them, 'I will give this land to your descendants.'**

It's there, in God's relentless move toward us in grace that we discover; to receive the promise of God, we must live with the God of the promise.

We'll explore & experience that grace today...

Let's pray...

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

*Father you call us as your own & release us into this world for your purposes. Let every thought word & deed be held firm in your grace. Make our worship today & our lives in all things a reflection of your mission to this world & the path ahead for this band of disciples one that invites others into your life & love. Amid challenges & changes equip us by your Spirit for whatever tasks you have set for us. Infuse your wisdom into our hearts so that we discern your will & way in all things for your glory & the widened embrace of your kingdom in this city...through Jesus we pray...  
Amen.*

*Let's hear God's word...*

## **FAITH CHAT:**

1. Have you ever experienced a time where you have doubted God's presence or goodness in your life? What did you do?
2. What are some things apart from God that you, or those you know, turn to for comfort & security in life?

## 11 PENTECOST '23 A – A JOURNEY OF PROMISE: REPLACING THE PROMISE

I have at some point told you about an old friend...Linda. She dated a classmate at seminary in Ohio & she was a wonderfully faithful young woman. I can't believe Jeff didn't marry her...she'd've kept him out of mischief...anyway. She was a shade older than we all were & was one of the managers at a small women's clothing store. She was perfect for her work... friendly helpful good listener knew her stock & how it served various needs. Once when we were all out for dinner just after the C-mas break she blurted out, "I hate Christmas." Now... She didn't really hate C-mas...she hated the deception some customers went through to "buy" an outfit, wear it w/o taking off the tags, decide they didn't like it & bring it back for a full refund. "If you're not sure, don't buy it & really please don't lie about it!" I fully understood her displeasure.

I remember the uproar when Tx began allowing "No fault" divorces...you could just skip past the "'til death do us part" bit w/ "irreconcilable differences." My Jr High School (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade) speech/drama teacher got a new Cadillac every year on her b-day. I understand the \$\$ bonus of lease arrangements that roll over like that, but even way back then I couldn't comprehend the affluent decadence involved in changing out your car every year...We look for all sorts of ways to change our minds at no cost & move on to something we think is "better." Better clothes... "better" spouse or a better deal we'll trade what we have for what we think is "better" at the blink of an eye. It's called "sin."

We exchange the truth of God's presence, protection, power, provision, & promise for whatever seems more attractive...immediate...tangibly rewarding. Adam/Eve trade intimacy w/ God & the fullness of his blessing in the Garden for the knowledge that they're naked & death apart from his fullness. It plagues us since. **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." How long? How long had it been? 40 days. **NB:** God's presence on Mt Sinai was obvious: thunder, earthquake, lightning, fire & clouds of smoke. God's voice rumbled as God spoke w/ Moses. It was for that very reason the people told Moses to go up & do the talking w/ God because they were scared. Nothing had changed in their lives except Moses wasn't standing right there. The obvious signs of God's presence w/ **them** were **ALL STILL THERE**. Nothing had changed. Except their hearts now clamoured for "new gods." Nothing had changed. Except them. **Rom 1:20-23** - *For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth & sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power & divine nature. They have no excuse for not knowing God. Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks, & began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their*

*minds became dark & confused...instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people & birds & animals & reptiles. It's called "sin." We exchange the truth of God's presence, protection, power, provision, & promise for whatever seems more attractive...immediate...tangibly rewarding. It plagues us still.*

*When the people saw how long...In the grand scope of their journey so far, 40 days is nothing...that's about how long I can't drive, 6 wks. They'd been slaves 430 years What's 40 days? But you know that because we've all done it: **We** too often **GIVE UP** too soon. When God doesn't operate on our timetable. When God gives an answer we don't like...No or Wait or this instead. When the results aren't what we asked for. *Pastor John I've prayed about this...* Have you been asking or telling? There's a difference. Yes...awful things happen in spite of our prayers...Now it's time to pray asking how to glorify God in the awful...Jennifer Rothschild a Xn singer/songwriter lost her sight to a vision disorder in her early teens. She says her heroes became those who had lost far more than their sight & found ways to serve & honour God in their loss. She writes: "**God** allows what he hates in order to accomplish what he loves." God grieves our griefs. God's heart breaks over our broken hearts. God suffers our lostness & confusion & groping & grasping in the dark...All so that God can lead us to himself – his light – his way – his truth – his hope – his promise - his heart. I agree nobody went out & asked for this in your life...now ask God to lead you to him so that some hope, sense & new life can come from ashes, tears, & wreckage. We **GIVE UP** too soon*

So Aaron commands for gold & crafts a bull idol. **Aaron** took the gold, melted it down, & moulded it into the shape of a calf. *When the people saw it, they exclaimed, "O Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt!" 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!"* Just like they have <sup>b</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, the Israelites lie about their history. Last week we noted they rewrote the story of their slavery unto death w/ bright colours & read it through rose-tinted glasses. This week they invent a new **FAKE** exodus story. That gold bull w/ his big horns & big sexy bits just showed up. He didn't lead 'em anywhere...couldn't if they asked! **THAT** led to **THIS**... **The** people got up early the next morning to sacrifice burnt offerings & peace offerings. After this, they celebrated with feasting & drinking, & indulged in pagan revelry. P-R simply means they're doing what they saw the Egyptians do in some of their festivals. This is nothing like Passover...nothing like any of the worship that would have existed among the Israelites in their homes ...nothing like the prayers or praises they would have offered even in captivity. P-R was always fertility worship...sex-infused...they're running nekkid through the camp.

21<sup>st</sup> C sex-craziness is just P-R

But let's not get too far afield...Anyone here ever said, "Man I got lucky." "By sheer coincidence..." "I dodged a bullet" "Fate smiled my way." When we tell the story of our lives as if God had no role, just like the nekkid Israelites **We RECONSTRUCT THE STORY** wrong. If we invoke luck, chance, coincidence, fate...all pagan deities...or blame someone else for our mistakes bad circumstances. We often create a narrative for our lives that makes God out to be the bad guy...God caused my tragedy – didn't keep this from happening...the church hurt me so to heck w/ them & God! When my achievements, accomplishments, & accumulations become the measure for my life... When I live for no one else but me...I'm as guilty as the nekkid Israelites dancing around the bull. We **GIVE UP** too soon - **RECONSTRUCT THE STORY** wrong...When that happens ...what's our role?

**The Lord** said, "I have seen how stubborn & rebellious these people are. Now leave me alone so my fierce anger can blaze against them, & I will destroy them. Then I will make you, Moses, into a great nation." Have you ever been tempted to pray for Jesus to return & just blast the people you think are evil? Almost daily? Here's the question: When I'm tempted to let God just cut loose w/ a few well-placed bolts of lightning... **Am I PLEADING FOR** or **RAGING AGAINST** or even worse **TOLERATING** unfaith...even evil.

Watch Moses: **But** Moses tried to pacify the Lord his God. "O Lord!" he said. "Why are you so angry with your own people whom you brought from the land of Egypt with such great power & such a strong hand?...Turn away from your fierce anger. Change your mind about this terrible disaster you have threatened against your people! Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, Israel. You bound yourself with an oath to them, saying, 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven. I will give them all of this land that I have promised to your descendants, & they will possess it forever.'" So the Lord changed his mind about the terrible disaster he had threatened to bring on his people.

Trust me it's easier to turn a blind eye to unfaith & evil than anything...to just pretend it's all going to be ok. If I didn't see it I don't have to care about it. If I don't talk to you about it then we can still be friends. Raging is equally low impact. I can hop up & down & call PMs Premiers & Presidents liars criminals & hooligans & I might be right. I can disbelieve everything I see or hear in the MSM...just assume they're lying & I could be correct. I can assume evil intent behind every decision made by Tech moguls, pharmaceutical companies, media talking heads & corporate oligarchs...& then what happens? But to lay <sup>b</sup>/<sub>4</sub> God pleading for those who deserve his wrath, to beg God to be true to his own mercy, to remember his own graciousness, to see his covenant through to fulfilment puts you/me in the place of priestly mediation...which is precisely our call. Am I **PLEADING FOR** or **RAGING AGAINST** or **TOLERATING** unfaith...God calls us, like Moses to plead for the rebellious...to pray for the straying...& to call to account those who thumb their nose @ God

Why is our pleading so crucial? Because... **There** IS a moment of **ACCOUNTABILITY** in our **OBEDIENCE** or **DISOBEDIENCE**. **Moses** saw the calf & the dancing, & he burned with anger. He threw the stone tablets to the ground, smashing them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf they had made & burned it. Then he ground it into powder, threw it into the water, & forced the people to drink it. Finally, he turned to Aaron & demanded, "What did these people do to you to make you bring such terrible sin upon them?" Moses has pleaded for the rebellious...prayed for the straying...& now calls to account those who thumb their nose @ God. And then...**Moses** saw Aaron had let the people get completely out of control, much to the amusement of their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp & shouted, "All of you who are on the Lord's side, come here & join me."...& 3000 fall to the sword of judgment. There is a recompense for those who revolt against God. The truth is undeniable: **God** fights **FOR** his people; but he fights **AGAINST** those who reject him. God is jealous **FOR** our hearts to be his & jealous **AGAINST** whatever would take his place. What does Jesus say? *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets & stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me. Now, look, your house is desolate.*—Lk 13:34 There IS a moment of **ACCOUNTABILITY**

**The Lord** said to Moses, "Get going, you & the people you brought up from the land of Egypt. Go up to the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob. I told them, 'I will give this land to your descendants.' In the midst of fickle human hearts God never relents on his promise to bless his people...we can't write God out of the story of life among his creation. We can't write grace & love, forgiveness & restoration out of God's character. It's there, in God's relentless move toward us in grace that we discover; **to** receive the promise of God, we must live with the God of the promise. Only God & His promises lead us on the journey to fullness of life w/ Him both now & for all eternity. As the risen Jesus promises...*I am with you always even to the end of the age*

**TAKE IT HOME** - As you leave today...be specific & share with your neighbour

**What** in your life at times replaces the Father as having the final word for you?

*What replaces God at the centre (driver's seat) of your heart & existence?*

**How** might God be asking you to allow him to tear that down so he can resume His gracious Sovereignty over you?

Let's pray with that in mind... "Lord, do whatever you need to do **IN** us, so you can do whatever you want to do **THROUGH** us so that all whom we know in this city & beyond might be called into the embrace of your love, the fullness of your power & the joy of your purpose...through Jesus Christ... Amen.