

*3*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.” *2*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.” *3*So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. *4*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!” *5*When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord.” *6*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.

*7*The Lord said to Moses, “Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; *8*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!’” *9*The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. *10*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.” *11*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? *12*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. *13*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.’” *14*And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

It all began with anxiety. Moses, their leader, had been on the holy mountain nearly forty days. He had no cell phone to let them know he would be coming down soon - no skype so that they could look in on what was happening to him. Moses had led them out of Egypt. When Pharaoh's army pursued, Moses raised his staff and the waters of the Red Sea parted to provide a way of escape. Once God's chosen people were safe on the other shore the waters of that sea came rushing in – drowning the enemy. They had learned to trust Moses but now he was absent. They needed some reassurance – something to cling to. That is what Aaron tried to give them – a god they could see and touch in this moment of fear and anxiety.

Aaron, Moses' brother, made a calf of gold and said, “This is your god who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” Now Aaron knew that it was the Lord who had freed them from slavery – he built an altar and said,

“Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.” But in that moment faith in the unseen God was not enough – a golden calf became a substitute for the unseen God.

The Lord was not pleased. The Lord said to Moses, “Go down at once! Your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have been quick to turn aside from the way I commanded them. 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.”

The people lose faith in God and God forgets whose people they are. “Your people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt” is what the Lord said – as if this was all Moses’ idea from the beginning which it was not. On that very mountain the Lord had appeared to Moses with the command that Moses go to free God’s people from slavery.

When things go wrong blame is often the first line of defense.

But Moses implored the Lord and said, “O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?” Moses knows that he has just been the middle-man – the Lord is the one on whom the people really depend.

Moses then offered two more arguments as to why the Lord should not destroy the people. If you do the Egyptians will say that you intended to destroy them all along.

And then - remember your promise to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, that you promised to give them descendents as numerous as the stars.

And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster he planned to bring on the people.

Sometimes I think that story slipped by the censors. What kind of a story is it when the Lord needs to be reminded to keep a promise? In most of the scriptures the Lord is working to change the minds and the deeds of people but in this story Moses intercedes for the people and convinces the Lord to change the Lord’s mind.

Is that what we are doing when we pray – asking the Lord to have mercy? Part of me thinks that we should not need to pray – that in love and wisdom the Lord will always be working to do the best. But Jesus teaches us to ask and

to knock – to pray for ourselves and to pray for others. Is it possible that like Moses we sometimes change the mind of God? Who knows.

St. Paul tells us that Jesus and the Holy Spirit intercede for us. Even when we do not have words but only sighs that the Spirit is speaking to the Father for us.

And Jesus? Jesus who ate with tax collectors and sinners and told of the shepherd who left 99 sheep in the wilderness to go and look for the one lost sheep – what does it mean for us that Jesus is talking to the Father on our behalf? It means salvation for you with Jesus on your side.

Join Jesus in interceding. Speak to the Father about the ones who are having a tough time now. Maybe they are sinners that deserve nothing but punishment – remind God of the mercy God has promised. Remind God of the steadfast love that the scriptures declare. Remind God how people will be impressed if God is merciful to sinners.

Speak to the Father about those who have sorrow now, or sickness, or who live in poverty. Speak to God believing that your words may make all the difference as Moses' words did – as Jesus' words do.

Who knows. You might help God to remember God's promises. Amen.