

## CHANGING MINDS

Exodus 32:1-14  
Luke 15:1-10

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Have you ever thought about the attributes of God? What I mean by God's attributes is what makes God God. I must admit that until I went to seminary I hadn't given it much consideration. Up until then, to me, God is the Creator of the Universe. God is omnipotent; meaning God can do anything. God is omnipresent; meaning God is everywhere. What else is there to consider? But such seemingly esoteric through actually occupied the minds of some of the greatest teachers and pastors of the Church since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. People like Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus of Lyon, Basil the Great, even Augustine of Hippo – almost every church father (and several church “mothers” such as Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Sienna) wondered what made God God.

One of those attributes is immutability; that is, unchangability. Athanasius, a bishop in Alexandria and who wrote an early draft of our Nicene Creed, also wrote quite a bit about this attribute of God. When our Protestant Reformation forefathers began their arguments with the Roman Catholic church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Luther, Bucer, Calvin, and their colleagues drew upon the writings of this 5<sup>th</sup> century church teacher on how God was the same yesterday as God is today as God will be tomorrow.

But I have to confess that, in my opinion, God's immutability, as has been interpreted by some, doesn't mean the Lord' mind can't be changed. Scripture holds several examples; including today's

reading. Our text from *Exodus* tells the sad tale of the people of Israel falling away from God's path to the Promised Land. *Exodus* is more than a long, long road trip for the Israelites. It isn't simply a journey from Egypt to Canaan. It is God's way of changing the hearts and minds of a people specially chosen to be a light to the nations, a lamp to the feet of the world.

The danger about these attributes of God is that we begin thinking that God can't go beyond them. It's like we try to fit the Lord of the universe into a bread box, and, by God, nobody better not try to get out of it. But, when we read the Scriptures carefully, and fully, then we discover that certain things about God don't fit our preconceived notions; like this attribute of immutability.

On the one hand, I profess that the God who created the universe and all that is in it is the same God who led the Israelites through the wilderness, and that same God sent Jesus the Christ to be the Savior of the world, and is the same God who is at work through the Holy Spirit to change our hearts and minds, shaping them, conforming us to live and share in God's love, iving this Triune God glory and honor forever. I'll also profess that while God's being doesn't change; it doesn't mean that God can't change His mind about wanting to destroy a wayward and sinful people.

Our *Exodus* passage tells of while Moses was bringing down from the mountain two tablets of stone which contained the 10 Commandments, the people abandoned God and Moses, and built

an idol in the form of a golden calf. The Lord calls the Israelites “stiff-necked,” but it seems to me they were not just stubborn, but fickle as well – forgetting the miracles of water and manna, leaving off the grace God showed them at the Passover, and even God’s mighty hand that held back the Red Sea allowing them to cross to freedom.

We become fickle in our journey of faith as well. We become impatient and we are stubborn in wanting things here at church to be the way we remembered them 25 – 30 years ago. We find excuses not to change – our age, our children or grandchildren, our financial situation, our neighborhoods, our friends. Isn’t it so much easier to say as did the Israelites to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.” Yes, we don’t want God speaking directly to us because God will hold us to our promises; God will give us ministries and missions that will take us where we don’t want to go – into the trailer parks and among low-income folk, into the hospitals, into the jails, into the lives of families who wait on pins and needles for their loves ones to return to take over the family farm.

Once the people saw that Moses was delayed on the mountain, they began to change their minds about following God. They began to do what they thought was right in their eyes. As I said, it’s a sad tale of people losing their heart and trust in God’s process – the Lord’s effort to change a people. But we know that the effort is unchanging; that God continues to desire that we change and turn to Him, to rely on Him, to follow God through our discipleship in Jesus. Yes, we will

sometimes create our own idols; and yes, they may be made into a god (read: idol) – but we can put our faith in the true God because our God is a gracious God; in the words of the Psalmist, “slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”

Yes, the Lord of all may have changed God’s mind about destroying the Israelites as they danced around the Golden Calf, but God’s purpose hasn’t changed since that time. The Lord continues to shape a people to be His light in the world. My question to you all this day is, “Will you commit to being God’s people, to being God’s witnesses in the world?”

God calls us to ministry and mission in Jesus’ name. We are to leave behind the idols of gold, of hearth and home, even of this church building, and go out to do the work of God in the world. Use these things as tools and resources to accomplish what God calls you to do, but do not see them as an end to themselves. God continues to lead His people toward the promised Kin-dom – are we willing to follow – or, will we change our minds?

Let us pray:

Holy and mighty God, in Jesus the Christ You showed us the way to be Your people, let us not fall away. Give us courage, and patience to follow You through Christ. Pour out Your Holy Spirit upon us so that we are empowered to do the ministries and missions to which You call us. Let our hearts be at peace as we journey toward Your Promised Life eternal. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.