

## **SERMON: 11 October 2020 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **Exodus 32:1-14**

#### **God is passionate about his relationship with you**

There are so many echoes in Exodus and in the life of Moses which are heard in the life of Jesus.

Holiness, justice and love come through a man.

God and Moses are presented as dwelling together closely.

Pointing to God and Jesus being one.

God with skin on.

Moses, the Saviour of God's people Israel.

Pointing to Jesus, the Saviour of the World.

And now, in the Spirit of Jesus, ordinary people, like you and me, are being called, as Moses, to stand in the gap between God and our brothers and sisters whilst also embracing the Oneness with God which Jesus began.

Like Moses did.

Like Jesus did.

Exodus 32 begins with Moses up the mountain in the presence of God.

Now we shouldn't gloss over that too quickly.

Moses is in the place where he's meant to be.

In the presence of the almighty.

In relationship with the Divine.

One with the One.

That's why his face shone so brightly because he'd spoken to the Lord face to face (34:29).

People are made for relationship with God and with one another.

Exodus 34:14 (NLT) says "God ... is passionate about his relationship with you".

Anything that gets in the way of that is sin.

And that's the problem in Exodus 32 which is also the human problem in every generation.

Sin is creating something less than God.

The story of the Israelites making a golden calf is an almost humorous, unbelievable, scandalous account of people settling for something less than God.

Something they can see and perhaps even control. Something made from the sweat of their own hands or which they think they deserved. Something plundered from the wealth of the Egyptians who had held them captive before they began their journey to freedom.

Make us some gods who can lead us. Who knows what's happened to this guy Moses (32:1).

How could Aaron have possibly been deceived into doing what he did - to take their golden ear rings and cast them into the shape of a calf or a bull.

Bull worship was common among nations at the time, Egypt included.

Indeed there's a story in 1 Kings 12:26-30 of King Jeroboam of Israel making 2 golden calves and setting them up in Bethel and Dan, to save them going to Jerusalem, and him saying to Israel, 'here are the gods who brought you out of Egypt'.

It's probably the same story in two different places. And both highlight the problem of sin as being people relating to something less than God, the God who made them and loves them and wants to dwell with them in relationship.

Sin is when that relationship breaks down.

In verse 9 YHWH sees what his people are doing and the writer has YHWH wanting to blaze his anger against them and destroy them.

But then there is Moses there to stand between, to intercede on behalf of God's people.

We could read this as a human attempt to appease an angry God but it's not like that.

It's a literary technique to show that this God is not like the other gods who need to be appeased and bargained with.

According to the Psalmist, this God is the god whose faithful love endures forever; who, when his people rebel, still saves them, who, when his people grumble and complain, shows them mercy; who, when they go after other gods, pities them and hears their cries.

This God remembers his covenant and treats them with unfailing love.

If you don't believe me, go away and read Psalm 106 from start to finish.

When Moses pleads with YHWH to turn away from his fierce anger and change his mind and remember his covenant (12), the writers are stressing that this God is different and that these qualities are what this God is truly like.

But the role of Moses matters.

YHWH chose Moses. He saved and called him.

He called him to be in relationship with him and he called him to stand in the gap on behalf of others.

He called him to get to know him in relationship.

If you read on into Exodus 34 you find that Moses discovers that YHWH is the Lord, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and rich in unfailing love and faithfulness, forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion (34:6-7).

Moses needed to spend time with God on the mountain, in the cloud, to discover what God was like.

And then he needed to let that discovery influence everything he then went on to say and do, so that he could truthfully tell others what God was really like.

Not like other gods. Not like idols made of gold. Not a possession to be added.

This God is Love.

This God is like the Wind, can't be controlled, but blows where it wills.

This God breaks down the distance between God and humanity brings them together in loving relationship.

And we call that mystery Christ.

The Christ Anointing was glimpsed in individuals like Moses.

The Christ Life is fully alive in Jesus of Nazareth.

And now Christ lives in us by faith.  
And waits to see what we might do ...