

Rev. Dan Welch Lent 5 -Wednesday 4-10-19 Text- Exodus 32:1-14

## **The Sixth Part in the Series**

### **Exodus: Let My People Go!**

#### **“Digging Ourselves into a Hole”**

It was a Sunday afternoon in northern Wisconsin around the year 2010 when the Welch family decided to pile in the old minivan and go for a Sunday drive though in the National Forest. This was just a few miles from our then home town of Thorp, Wisconsin. We used to love going for 2 or 3 hour drives through the woodlands and find places to get out and let the kids go exploring for shells and mollusks in the lakes and streams. After that maybe find a playground where they could get out of the van and run around.

Then we would look for some more roads to drive on, both paved and gravel. So, it came to pass that day that I made a turn that ended up being a *wrong* turn. The paved road we were on turned into a gravel road, which turned into a dirt road which all of the sudden turned into a road with lots of mud and sand. As it continued to get worse and worse, I thought about turning back but I figured. “No, I’ve got this. I’ll just navigate around the really sandy areas. We can make it through. Besides backing up at that point might actually be worse than going forward.” That, of course, is when it happened.

We hit some really deep sand and just like that we were stuck. Five sets of eyes glared at me. But I wasn’t about to panic. I would get us out this little jam. I hit the accelerator, full throttle. The van didn’t budge. Neither did I! I hit the accelerator again, confident that we’d get out.

The result? We ended up going deeper and deeper in the sand. We were stuck in the middle of a forest with no one else around and no way out. Aaron knows. Oh my! Aaron, Moses’s older brother, he knows what it feels like to be stuck in the sand.

We’re in a series on the book of Exodus and today/ this evening we come to Exodus 32. First, Aaron takes a wrong turn. Second, Aaron gets stuck. Third, Aaron hits the accelerator and ends up digging himself and the Israelites into a huge hole. I feel his pain!

The golden calf episode in Exodus 32 is sandwiched between God’s instructions to Moses about the tabernacle (Ex 25–31) and the tabernacle’s construction (Ex 35–40).

“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’” (Ex 32:1). Moses had been

on the top of Mt. Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. People were getting impatient. “How long?”

You know the feeling. So do I. We see how long it takes to get through school. We see how long it takes to build a marriage. We see how long it takes to raise children. We see how long it takes to save money. We don’t like a God who makes us wait. We want a god who can satisfy—*right now!*

That’s what Aaron offers. “‘Take the gold rings from the ears of your wives and sons and daughters, and bring them to me.’ All the people took the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. Then Aaron took the gold, melted it down, and molded it into the shape of a calf” (Ex 32:2–4). Aaron offers a god who can satisfy— *right now!* And with that, Aaron takes a wrong turn. Next? Aaron gets stuck.

“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!’” (Ex 32:5). Aaron makes a stunning claim. Aaron calls the calf “the LORD.” Really? The calf is the LORD?

Question. How often do we exchange the real God for a fake god and then claim that the fake god is the real God? Answer. We do this too often. *We do this far too often!* What are the top fake gods in America? Money, sports, and jobs. Money, sports, and jobs promise everything. In the end money, sports, and jobs deliver nothing.

Aaron takes a wrong turn. Aaron gets stuck. Aaron then hits the accelerator and ends up digging himself and the Israelites into a huge hole! And what would that be?

“Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry” (NIV) (Ex 32:6). “Got up to indulge in revelry” here means to engage in “sexual immorality.” When Paul reflects on Exodus 32 in 1 Corinthians 10:8 that’s exactly what he calls it—sexual immorality. Oh no! What a huge hole!

It starts out just like Aaron. We get impatient. “How long!” We take a wrong turn. We get stuck. But then we’re tempted to hit the accelerator. How so? By disregarding the sixth commandment. “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex 20:14).

Someone shows up on Facebook and just wants to talk. Someone offers a listening ear, a gentle touch, or more. Justifications and rationalizations pop up like weeds after a summer rain. “No one will know. I won’t get caught. What’s the big deal? I’m only human.” We don’t like the God who makes us wait. We want a god who can satisfy—*right now!*

Let me say this as clearly as possible. *Don't hit the accelerator!* If you're stuck in an emotional, financial, or relational hole, don't make matters worse by doing something you'll regret for the rest of your life. Here's what I suggest. Make a list of all the people you would hurt by doing something immoral.

Dads, would you intentionally break the arm of your child? Of course not. That would violate every fiber of your being. But if you have an affair you will bring much more pain into your children's lives than a hundred broken arms.

Moms, would you force your children to sleep outside on a cold winter night? Of course not! But if you have an affair, you will bring more darkness and chill into the lives of your children than a hundred winters.

If you are unmarried, would you desecrate a Bible or make a mockery of the cross? Of course not! Yet when you are immoral, you break God's heart.

In Exodus 32:21, 30, 31 Moses calls Israel's sexual immorality a great sin. It's a great sin because of *who* committed it—Aaron, the high priest, and the Israelites, God's chosen people. It's a great sin because of *where* they committed it—on Mount Sinai, God's holy mountain. It's a great sin because of *when* they committed it—right after God delivered them from Egypt with a mighty hand and outstretched arm. If I were Moses I'd wash my hands of the whole mess. But Moses doesn't do that. Moses doesn't do that at all!

Moses prays, "Turn away from your fierce anger. Change your mind about this terrible disaster you have threatened against your people! Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel" (Ex 32:12–13). When you are in a hole, claim the covenant! What covenant? God's covenant with the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. And guess what happens?

"The LORD changed his mind about the terrible disaster he had threatened to bring on his people" (Ex 32:14). The covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel is an everlasting covenant sealed in blood—that's what Genesis 15:10 tells us. Sin can't break this covenant. Idolatry can't nullify it. Death can't defeat it. And a huge hole can't destroy it. *A huge hole can't destroy it!*

The covenant that God cut with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel? It's fulfilled in the death of Jesus. God's covenant promises are sealed forever in Jesus's blood, shed on the cross, for you. The covenant blood of Jesus announces that God is always loving. God is always kind. God is always forgiving. God is always abounding in grace and mercy for you.

We have all taken wrong turns. We have all built golden calves. We have all worshiped other gods. We have all known what it's like to be in a hole, to get ourselves into a tight spot and we don't see how we'll ever get out. It

doesn't matter how deep our hole is though, we're not stuck. *We are not stuck in a hole forever!*

What can we do? We can do what Moses did. Claim the covenant. Claim Christ's new covenant promises that are delivered to us in His cleansing, powerful, and renewing blood. Amen.