

Being True

Exodus 32:1-14; Philippians 3:4b-14; Matthew 21:33-46; Psalm 106:1-6,19-23 10-12-08

We just sang a very simple little song. Its tune is simple, the words are clear. There is no deep, hidden theological meaning. It is a song many of us have sung from our childhood on. It sings of being true to oneself, to others and to the pathway God has set before us.

It might have been a good thing for Aaron to have this song running through his mind before he set out to create the golden calf for the nation of Israel to worship. The people needed, wanted and demanded a tangible god, not a being standing at a distance that could not be seen and touched. Aaron yielded to mob sentiment.

Our story tells us that Aaron, Moses brother, had been with him from the day that God had called him into service. Aaron had been chosen to speak for Moses because Moses was unsure of himself. Aaron knew what it was that was required of him. And, yet, he slipped from the pathway set before him when Moses was up on the mountain conferring with God. The words, “I would be true, for there are those who trust me,” were nowhere in his consciousness.

Moses and God trusted Aaron to be true and he let them down. God expressed anger to Moses over this incident but Moses, as he often did, managed to convince God that things would be better and God backed off. It is an interesting tale.

Becoming true to God and ourselves and to others is a long process. It does not happen overnight—it takes trial and error, success and failure until we begin to get it right and discover the pathway that follows the principles set out in the teachings we find in the Bible.

It is a journey, much like the one Paul embarked upon when he discovered the life and teachings of Jesus and resolved to learn more and more about him. Paul, as self-assured as he seemed, realized that there was much he did not fully understand and he knew that he had to press on to see clearly what he saw at first dimly.

While we might like to believe we know everything there is about the teachings spelled out for us in the pages of our Bible, there is always more to learn, more to discover. We uncover nuances in those familiar stories we did not know existed upon our first reading. But, life comes along and it handles us or we handle it, and through this process we begin to see more clearly as did Paul.

Jesus tried, through parable and allegory to help those who followed him understand how important it was to remain true to God. He was well versed in the Hebrew Bible and he probably noted the themes that played over and over again through its pages. Faithfulness to God was the principle that undergirded the stories and lessons in the Hebrew Bible and that came to undergird his message, also.

In this morning’s parable, which has been turned into an allegory by most interpreters, Israel is represented by the vine-growers—those who tend to the vineyard. God is the landowner. God has trusted Israel to be the caretaker of all God has given that nation. God expects it to be open to further direction. The servants sent to collect what was owed to the landowner were the prophets who were beaten, stoned and killed. Finally,

the landowner's son was sent. The father believed the tenants would get the message and respect this child. They killed him, also. Jesus issued a warning to Israel that it would pay for its treachery and pay dearly. In stirring things up the way he did Jesus helped ensure his death.

So, what does all of this say to us in our terribly troubled and confusing world? If we are biblical literalists these readings should scare us and keep us watching our step and keeping on our toes to make sure we never make even one mistake.

If we are realists we understand that much is learned about life from our mistakes and failures. Just as Paul learned from his mistakes and failures and as Aaron most likely did. God will not come from wherever it is that God is located and lop off our heads if we make a mistake. If that would happen we would all look a lot different. God, as we understand the deity, is a loving being. God forgives us when we turn away and do stupid, human things, when we forget to be true to the way set before us. Jesus revealed these facets of God to us. We know that it is always up to us to decide to turn around and straighten up and proceed through life the way we are expected to proceed.

It is up to us to decide if we will be true for the sake of those who trust us; to be strong, for as good as life is, there is much to suffer; to be brave for there is much to dare. We will have to choose if we are going to be friends of all the foes, the friendless. Will we be generously giving without expectations of any thanks? And, can we be humble because we are well acquainted with our own weaknesses?

These are decisions that have faced humans in all ages as they have struggled to discover the proper way to follow God. They face us in our day and age more than ever before. Amen