

Summit Presbyterian Church
Preached by Rev. Sue Cyre
9/25/11
Text: Exodus 32:1-6
Title: Walking with God: Slowly

Here's a little test. See how you do. Are these familiar quotes actually in Scripture?

Is "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" in the Bible? The answer is: No.
How about, "There is a time for everything" The answer is Yes.

What about "Everyone is equal under the Sun." That is Not in the Bible.

What about "For what we are about to receive, Lord make us truly thankful"
That is Not in the Bible

How about "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" That's from
Shakespeare.

What about "Do not be fooled: you can't cheat God." That is IN the Bible.(Gal
6:7)

How about "Money is the root of all evil" That is Not in the Bible. The verse
in the Bible from 1 Timothy 6:10, is "The love of money is the root of all evil."

What about, "God helps those who help themselves." That is not in the Bible.

Some of these are so familiar, we've heard them since we were children, that
we begin to think that they are from Scripture and most are not. And worse,
we begin to live our lives based on these as if they were God's word.

I suspect "God helps those who help themselves" has been the basis of much
action, even by Christians. In today's culture full of shakers and movers, we
don't need much encouragement to "take the bull by the horns" and act.

We're especially prone to action because we're an "instant" culture. We expect
everything to happen instantly and when it doesn't we set about "helping
ourselves" and assume God is pleased with our effort.

We're not a patient people. We want instant everything. Computers give us instant answers, instant mail and instant messages.

We have instant communication with cell phones that stick out of our back pockets and purses. I'm always amazed when I fly somewhere that as soon as the wheels touchdown, everyone takes out cell phones and start talking. It is fascinating to watch people on their cell phones—everywhere—walking to planes, driving in cars, walking on the street. Everyone has a phone to their ear.

So, unlike years ago when you struck up a conversation with the person next to you in line, people now are absorbed in checking their email on their cell phones or talking on their cell phones or watching movies on their cell phones or taking pictures with their cell phones. What did we ever do without them?

We have instant transportation—planes fly us across the country in hours and yet we're impatient when the flight is delayed a few minutes.

We have instant food in microwaves—which I'm grateful for. We're in a tremendous hurry—for travel, for time, for answers, for solutions. Everything has to move quickly. And if the answer doesn't come quickly enough—we take matters into our own hands to correct the situation and we assume God is right there with us.

Well, in today's text Moses is up on Mt. Sinai for 40 days and the people become impatient and ask Aaron to build them a golden calf. Moses had gone up on Mt. Sinai and gotten the 10 commandments.

....The people then ratify the covenant in Exodus 24 and agree to obey the commandments. Then Moses goes back up on Mt. Sinai to get the 10 commandments written on the stone tablets and God gives him the pattern for the tabernacle. Once the covenant is ratified, God provides the specifications where the Moses will meet with God on behalf of the people. And where the people will offer sacrifices to God.

So at this point Moses has been up on Mt. Sinai getting the blueprints for the tabernacle and the 10 Commandments on the stone tablets for 40 days.

The mountain we think is Mt. Sinai is a barren rock with no vegetation and not much water. It would be hard to see how a person could survive on Mt. Sinai for 40 days.

What the people knew from their own experience and common sense and their understanding of how the world works, led them to fear Moses was dead and therefore they take matters into their own hands. God helps those who help themselves, right? So they built a calf.

Not only could the people not see Moses, but because Moses is God's spokesman, the people couldn't see God either. Moses was the mediator between the people and God. The person who had the connection to God, Moses, is missing—presumed dead.

Not only did the people feel that Moses must be dead, but they can no longer see and hear God through Moses—the connection is gone. When they built the calf it was most certainly idolatry. But, look at what they were doing—they were making a god they could see. Sight was the problem. And in their fear and impatience—they took matters into their own hands.

The people wanted the connection with Yahweh, so they build this calf and then say, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

Then they say, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD—to Yahweh. So the next day, they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play."

The people don't reject God, but they are impatient, fearful, alone---so they craft an idol they can see and then say that this is their god.

People worship something from creation—calves or elephants or stocks or jobs or status, or health because we feel safer, more secure, when we can see and touch God. The idols become gods because of our need to see and touch..and be in control.

There are other examples of impatience at God's slowness in Scripture that leads to sin. Abraham waited for God to fulfill his promise to have a son, but God moved too slow and Abraham said to himself, "God helps him who helps

himself” and he went into Hagar the maid, and she bore a son, Ishmael. It took God 25 years to fulfill his promise to Abraham to have a child by Sarah.

The struggle between the descendants of Ishmael, the Arabs, and the descendants of Isaac, the Jews, continues today, 4,000 years later as this week’s events at the UN make clear.

Peter couldn’t wait in the Garden—he couldn’t see God acting—not the way he wanted God to act. So, Peter said, “God helps him who helps himself” and cut off the servant’s ear.

There are some instances of people waiting patiently on God, even when it took 25 years. David, had been anointed king by Samuel, but it was 25 years before Saul died and David became king. In those 25 years David had 2 opportunities to kill Saul and take the throne. But he refused to harm God’s anointed one—so he waited—patiently.

Walking with God, which has been the focus this sermon series, means walking slowly, patiently, sometimes without seeing everything clearly.

It means not losing patience and building an idol to deal with our despair, our fear, our uncertainty. Walking with God, means walking slowly by faith, patiently waiting for God’s will and plan to unfold.

We’re not a generation that walks slowly, patiently. We find it hard to be in it for the long haul—we want quick solutions and easy answers. And when we can’t see that, we get impatient and build idols.

The first commandment that God had given the people is “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on earth beneath...”

It is now 40 days from the time they heard that commandment and said, “Everything the Lord has said we will do” and the blood of the covenant was sprinkled on the people and on the altar.

Now 40 days later all of that is forgotten because they are afraid. They feel lost, worried. Who will speak to God for us? Who will ask God for water or manna?

In the Westminster Larger Catechism it explains what is prohibited by the first commandment. It includes: ignorance, forgetfulness, misapprehensions, false opinions, unworthy and wicked thoughts of him [God]; self-love, self-seeking, distrust, despair, discontent and impatience at his dispensations, ascribing the praise of any good, we either are, have or can do, to fortune, idols, ourselves, or any other creature.” Like saying, it is the golden calf that brought them out of Egypt.

Don't we struggle with breaking the first commandment? We get impatient and act wrongly, when we should be patient and wait upon the Lord.

We are a generation that wants quick fixes and instant solutions and when they don't come we build our idols.

William Wilberforce, the 18th century English politician and Christian, worked his entire life to end slavery in Britain and bring civil reform in people's manners and lives. He died thinking that he accomplished nothing. He was patient and persistent. He never gave up. At one point those working with Wilberforce thought they had the votes to end slavery but the other side had given theater tickets to all those who would have abolished slavery. And the vote was lost. Still Wilberforce fought on for over 30 years. It was on his deathbed that he was told Parliament ended slavery.

John Calvin died thinking that he had accomplished nothing to reform the church and reform the city of Geneva.

Men who gave their lives for a cause that took longer than their lifetime to accomplish. That kind of patient waiting and persistent faith is not very common today.

The Bible is a 4000 year history of God working patiently, slowly, with his people to bring salvation; to bring his people into relationship with himself and give them eternal life. Four thousand years and he's not done yet. He's still working on us—and God promises that Christ will one day return. The story isn't over yet. Four thousand years and the story goes on.

We are living in that in-between time. Jesus has ascended. He is at the Father's right hand, interceding for us. One day he will return and there will

be anew heaven and new earth... cancer will be abolished, wars will cease, the church will no longer be torn by division.

Are we that patient? With each other and with God?

God's agenda is saving souls for eternity. Our agenda is to fix things now so our lives are smooth and easy. Our prayer is too often, "Hurry up God and give me patience." God often works slowly. His plans take decades and centuries and millennium. God isn't into instant anything.

Life can be terribly hard. Dealing with illness daily that goes on for years, is back breakingly hard. But, often God doesn't relieve the illness instantly, instead he helps carry our burden.

The future is frightening as we get older: will there be enough money, who will care for me; what will the children do when we're gone? God doesn't show us easy answers—he promises his presence. And he calls us to trust—even when we can't see.

Moses was up on the mountain 40 days getting the law and the people in fear and loss of patience, built a calf. When Jesus died, he was in the tomb 3 days fulfilling the law and his disciples waited—patiently.

Do you remember in Acts 27 when Paul was being taken to Rome as a prisoner? The ship stopped at a port on Crete but it wasn't a harbor suitable to winter in. Paul warned the captain that the ship would sink if they continued on. But they were impatient to be on their way. So, they set out again, hoping to get to a harbor where they could winter.

Paul was right. The ship sank in a storm and the men spent the 3 winter months on the island of Malta before they could set out again on another ship and head to Rome.

Disappointing? You bet. Fearful? Schedules changed? Lives nearly lost? How can any of that be a part of God's plan. Not at all like the instant answers and quick solutions that we want. Shipwrecks, delays, material goods lost.

I have a friend that went on a cruise to the Mediterranean that stopped at island of Malta. Their tour guide, who was probably not a Christian, told them that Malta is a Christian island today.

Paul spent 3 months there—inconvenient, ship wrecked, delayed.... And in those 3 months he shared that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior and now 2000 years later, the people of Malta are still Christian. You don't hear that in the Bible. But it's what happened. We get impatient and build idols, make bad decisions, give up, get shipwrecked. But, God is saving lives for eternity.

Patience. Trust. Walking slowly with God. He has a plan. Even when we don't see. Even when we don't understand. Have faith. Do not put your trust in idols. Trust God alone who will not fail or forsake us....ever. Amen.