

Reflections on Faith and Life for Lent 4, March 14, 2021

Scary things, hurtful things

Exodus 32:1-24: While Moses was up on Mt. Sinai receiving the “two tablets of the covenant law” (the Ten Commandments), the people of Israel remained at the foot of the mountain. Moses was gone so long, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. . . .” Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons, and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. **He took the gold from them, formed it into a mold, and cast an image of a calf;** and they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” -- Then the Lord told Moses what had been happening in the valley and sent him down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. (“They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.”)

When Moses reached the camp and saw the calf, and the people dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. He said to Aaron, “What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?” “Do not be angry, my lord,” Aaron answered. “You know how these people turn to evil. They said to me, ‘Make us gods who will go before us.’ . . . So I told them, ‘Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.’ **They gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!**”

A golden calf, created in ignorance and fear and a desire for power, then explained with a lie. Beware today’s golden “calves,” created from idols and surrounded by lies. Our God is the God of justice, righteousness, and steadfast love. He is the God who “so loved the world” that he came to die as one of us. This world is messy, broken, overwhelmed and overwhelming. Do you ever wonder *why* God so loves the world? But he does. And we owe it to him and to Jesus who died for us—for the world—to care for the world and all its people with that same justice, righteousness, and steadfast love.

As I write these words, jury selection is proceeding for the trial of Derek Chauvin, the police officer who killed George Floyd on May 25, 2020. Thousands of National Guard and law enforcement officers are prepared to respond to any disturbances of the peace. Whichever way the trial goes, many people will be angry.

Racism is not consistent with the love of God, who “so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that *everyone* who believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” We have no right to judge any person: **“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get”** (Matthew 7:1-2). **“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another”** (John 13:34).

Page 2, reflections

Christians—those who follow Christ—are bound by the *law of love* commanded by Jesus. **“Those who say ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also”** (1 John 4:20-21).

Citizens of the United States should be bound by the Constitution under which this *“one nation under God, indivisible”* was brought into being.

Amendment XIV, Ratified July 9, 1868: *“All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”*

I told this story to the 9th grade Confirmation students who will be confirmed on April 25th: A congregation in the rural part of a Central American nation had just begun worship in their small building. Two masked gunmen stormed in and stood, one at the front and one at the back. The man in front shouted, “If you’re willing to take a bullet for Christ, stay seated. If you’re not, leave now!” More than half of the men and women quickly rose and left the building. The man asked those remaining, “Are you willing to take a bullet for Christ?” No one stirred. The man took off his mask and said to the priest, “Father, you can get on with your worship. I’ve gotten rid of the hypocrites for you.”

Do we believe what we say we believe? Do we know what the Bible and our founding documents say? After Jesus was arrested, he was questioned by the high priest, Annas. Jesus said, **“If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?”** (John 18:23) Later he was questioned by Pilate, the Roman governor; he said, **“For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice”** (John 18:37).

Who are we as baptized children of God?