



Time to Trust

TEXT
Exodus 31:18–32:6

June 21, 2020 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

The Bible has some great stories. And the Bible has some weird stories. Sometimes they are weird because they were written in a different culture and a different time, and they were written thousands of years ago. But sometimes they are weird at any time and in any culture. This story of the golden calf is just a weird story.

Moses, the great leader of God's people, is up the mountain with God. There Moses receives the Ten Commandments, so it was a pretty important meeting.

Down in the valley, the people grow anxious, like they are in a waiting room. When is Moses going to return? What has happened to him? So, Aaron, Moses' brother, develops a plan. Let's make our own god. Let's create our creator. If God isn't saving us, let's save ourselves. Bring me your gold, and I'll get us a golden calf. People thought this was a great idea.

Of all the struggles life might bring us, I have absolutely no concern that any of us are going to make a god out of our jewelry.

And yet, this weird story actually names something that

is really contemporary. For at essence, this story is about whether God can be trusted or not.

Things went off the rails when Moses was delayed. God never seems to move quickly. Have you noticed? When God doesn't show up the way they want God to, they wonder if God can be trusted. God is evidently very patient.

About a billion years ago, life on earth was largely single-celled organisms. But then multicellular organisms began to emerge: algae and simple wormlike creatures and other organisms. This changed the shape of life on earth. This shift from single-cell to multi-cell organisms has been called the Cambrian Explosion — "explosion" because it happened so quickly. Now by "quickly," you may be thinking I'm talking about this happening over a weekend or so, but that's not right. This rapid explosion of new life took 10–20 million years — a time span that author Matt Ridley calls a "mere blink of the geological eye."¹

I am struck by the ability to speak of ten to twenty million years as a mere blink of an eye, geological or otherwise.

One thing it shows, if God can wait 20 million years to watch life develop this way, God is patient. That is a good thing. I assume were God not patient, God would have given up on us long ago.

But sometimes God's patience seems unending. And we wish God would get on with it. The people in the waiting room might have recited the Psalm ... you remember ... "How long, O Lord?" When Moses failed to return, they decided that the ways of God could no longer be trusted.

I've never seen times like these. The racial tension is global and folks are in the streets. The exhaustion is sprinkled with just a bit of hope that maybe we can actually make some much-needed change. NASCAR banned confederate flags. NASCAR! After the police kneeled on Mr. Floyd's neck, the NFL said they finally understand why Colin Kaepernick was kneeling. And more and more voices of law enforcement are saying that the culture of public safety needs to change. These small steps are in the right direction.

Our God has given us a vision of life lived justly. The commandments that Moses

carried down that mountain guide us in our regard for our neighbors, to treat neighbors the way we want to be treated. It may seem like the vision God has for us — for justice to roll down like waters — it may seem like that day is never going to come. It's in these active waiting days that we must decide if the ways of God can be trusted.

Before the explosion in Minneapolis, every night the news was about one thing: coronavirus. It's still out there, with over 118,000 deaths in the U.S. alone. And social distancing is breaking down — some driven to the streets by conviction. Some are finding bars and restaurants out of boredom. Some, as I said a few weeks ago, listen to news channels that tell them they don't have to trust science. They are their own experts; it's just media hype.

Our faith teaches us that it is holy to sacrifice for the common good. Our faith teaches us that it's not enough for me to be well. My neighbor needs to be well or I am not who I am called to be. But sacrifice for the common good is looked upon with suspicion. These are days when we have to decide if the ways of God can be trusted.

Maybe our largest threat is the climate. Our way of sustaining our lives is on an unsustainable path. According to NASA, from about 800,000 years ago until about the time I was born, the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (that carbon that traps heat) never exceeded

300 ppm. But about the time I was born until today, it has never been below 300 ppm and now is over 410 ppm. Our choices have consequences — consequences that are paid by all, but even more so by the poor. Storms are stronger and more frequent, and the damage is longer lasting. Hurricanes erase towns from the land. Dams break and flood waters wash towns away. Ice caps are melting, seas rising, species dying.

Our faith teaches us that the whole of creation belongs to God. We are not owners of the land, but stewards of that which belongs to God. But these are days when we have to decide if the ways of God can be trusted.

We talk about living toward God's promised day. But sometimes it feels like God has forgotten us and is just napping in God's mountain house; that God's patience is unending.

One of the protests I have attended was organized right here in our Village on Mission neighborhood. There were probably 1,000 people with Black Lives Matter signs.

The organizers asked a man named Joseph to run the public address system. Joseph is African American. Our pastor Brandon Frick emailed me a Facebook commentary Joseph posted. He said he is never at ease in Prairie Village. He never drives these streets without praying. But there were 1,000 people who turned out to say he matters. Joseph said God is doing something among us.

God is on the move in Prairie Village.

I think he is right. But I also think these are days when we need to decide if the ways of God can be trusted. God has gifted us with guidance on how to treat one another. And God has graced us with the life of Christ to show us the way.

Our faith teaches us that love is less a feeling and more the intentional choice to live for the good of the community, the good of the neighbor. There are some who deem such a sacrificial love to be foolish. That way of life will never work in this world.

So, it's important for us to show just how we believe the ways of God can be trusted.

¹Matt Ridley, *Genome* (1999), p. 26

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.