

I just love the story of the Golden Calf. It both amuses me and deeply frightens me.

- Here, the 12 tribes of Israel have just been delivered from slavery in Egypt,
- The Red Sea has split for their safe passage, and then it comes back together and drowns the Pharaoh's pursuing army!
- What a wild spectacle – they have seen and experienced the power of God! What more could you ask for?

Yet, the moment Moses disappears up the mountain and into the cloud, God's holy people are scared almost to death.

- All of a sudden, they find themselves in the middle of the desert! Oh my God, what's going to happen to us??
- And in their fear, they show themselves to be people just like you and me.

Here is the deepest human desire, laid out for all to see.

- We all want control. We all want predictability.
- And we will go to any measure to claw back even a semblance of control.
- Even if it means turning our backs on God and creating our own golden idols.

This is a story about us.

We want predictability and control. Something definite. Certainty!

- We want God on our own terms, so when God becomes too mysterious for us, we create something more manageable: a doctrine, a liturgy, a moral position, or even a particular practice of prayer or meditation.

And then we have this morning's Gospel: this strange story about a King's invitation to a banquet, but everyone he invites is too busy to come.

- This sounds like us, too, doesn't it? We have more important things to do.
- The king invites us to a deeper life – to communion with God – to freedom, Presence, to love.
- But we have more important stuff to do: our plans. Our schedules. Our precious obligations.

But wait, the story gets even stranger!

When his invited guests don't show, the king invites everyone:

- the good and the bad, the respectable and the disreputable, everyone!
- There's something quietly beautiful here. The invitation is not a reward for being spiritual. It's not a reward for being good people.
- The invitation is not a reward for the right beliefs, or the right liturgy.
- It is an invitation to us just because – because we are here. Because we are willing. Because we are loved and cherished.

But this invitation is stunningly revoked when a guest arrives who is disrespectful. He hasn't bothered to put on his festive garments and so he is thrown out.

- While all are invited, this one was not willing to let the banquet change him.
 - He was in the room without really being there.
 - And isn't that a lot like us, as well.
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- We, too, are often in the room without being present.
 - We participate in religion without truly opening ourselves to the Divine.
 - We come to church every Sunday; we wear our best Sunday clothes; but our hearts remained untouched and closed.

This is all starting to sound a bit like the Golden Calf, isn't it?

- We want God, but on our own terms.
- We want the comfort and security of our religion, without the costs.

You know, those pesky 10 commandments and the requirement to love one another as God has loved us.

But God – the God who created all of this – the God who created you and me and this world and this solar system and this galaxy and this universe – that God is not manageable by you and me. We cannot control the Divine!

- We are invited to the banquet – not to believe a certain something – but to *become* a certain something.
- We are invited to leave our self-centeredness, our need to control, our need for certainty.
- We are invited, in this banquet that surrounds us right now, to center our being on the Divine, to let go of our precious selves.

<Let me say that again>

So, let's take a moment and explore that. After all, we're in church, right? We're here to pay attention to our Lord, right?

So, let's explore how we might do that right here and right now.

I consider myself a scientist of sorts.

- Now, I understand that many don't consider psychology a the *real* science, but that's okay.
- Like real scientists, even psychologists like to engage in experiments. So, let's engage in a bit of an experiment this morning.

I would invite you to close your eyes and focus your attention inside yourself.

- Notice where “you” are: that self that is your identity. The one that bears your name.
- Where in your body is that self that you call “you”?
- Your self is probably in your head right now. You’re probably thinking, maybe wondering where this experiment is going.

So, take a moment and focus on the *content* of your thoughts.

- What exactly are you thinking about right now?
- While you’re doing this, notice also that you are *not* your thoughts.
- “You” have thoughts, right? But you are not just your thoughts. So, we have two elements here: you and your thoughts.

While we often confuse ‘the self that has thoughts’ with the thoughts themselves, clearly who you are is not identical with your thoughts.

- As evidence of this, we notice that our thoughts change all the time, but person that is *you* seems to persist from moment to moment.

Yet this doesn’t seem to fully describe us, does it? It seems like there’s something deeper still; something that we haven’t quite identified yet.

So let’s see if we can go a little deeper.

There is something even deeper than that self that seems to endure. That self is us, to be sure. But there is something missing from this description.

- It is something so ordinary, that we rarely notice it. It’s like the air we breathe; we just take it for granted.
- Deeper than every single self here, there is AWARENESS.
 - Take a moment, if you will, to let go of your sense of self.

- Let go of that identity that you've built from all of your past experiences; the identity that you project into the future.

Notice what happens.

- That sense of self that was centered in your head and wrapped up with all of your thinking, has shifted, hasn't it?
- When you become aware of the awareness within yourself – when you let yourself *rest* there – you'll notice that the center of your being has moved.
- It seems to migrate down into your chest, into the region of your heart.

Things feel different from here.

- There is a timeless quality here.
- There is an expansiveness – you seem to move out beyond the limits of your skin, beyond the limits of your identity.

When you root yourself in this deeper awareness – this awareness that we share with everyone else in the room – we find ourselves naturally letting go of the elements extraneous to this awareness.

- This awareness doesn't have a past, like you do, with specific memories that have you at the center of everything.
- This awareness cares nothing for the future, or for your plans.
- When you move into this awareness, you begin to move into the deeper layers of who you are.
- You begin to move into what I will call "Beingness" for the lack of a better term.
- You begin – here – to enter into stillness and into the depths of God.
- That Being who, when asked its name replied simply, "I AM."

Here, we find that the separate “I,” our self, loses its ultimate status.

- We experience for our own selves, in our own flesh, right now, that everything participates in this Beingness.
- We begin to realize that all things arise from and return to God. We begin to see, as St. Paul says in Galatians, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” -- Galatians 2:20
- And here, we find ourselves participating in the fullness of Christ.

<<Let us rest here for a time>>