

May 1, 2016

Animal Planet  
*Aaron's Calf*  
Exodus 32:1-4

**Opening words:** Nobel Prize winner Anatole France once said, *"Until one is loved by an animal, a part of one's soul remains unawakened."* As an animal lover myself, I can agree with that quote. There has never been a time when animals were not part of my home. In my home right now I have two pets: Madelyn, who is very smart and has us well trained, is a long-haired white cat. Macy, the best dog in the world, is my thirteen-inch beagle. You know it is true. We consider our pets part of our family.

Have you ever stopped to consider how many animals are found in the Bible? This is the final sermon in my four-part sermon series, *Animal Planet*. We began by looking at Daniel's lions. That story is about faith and courage. Next, we looked at Balaam's donkey. It is a story about communicating or discerning God's will. Last week, we looked at Jezebel's dogs. That is a story about judgement and accountability. Today, on Communion Sunday, we are going to look at Aaron's calf. It is a story about the importance of remembering. Don't be surprised if I return to this animal theme in the future. There are so many animal stories left.

Our scripture lesson for today comes from the Old Testament book of Exodus. The word 'exodus' comes from the Latin word meaning exit or departure. Tradition tells us it was written by Moses himself. The Exodus took place approximately 1300 years before the birth of Christ. Theologically, Exodus reveals God's name, his attributes, his redemption in his law and how he was to be worshipped. Our scripture reading for today is Exodus 32:1-4. I have called this message *Aaron's Calf*.

**Exodus 32:1-4** <sup>1</sup>When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

<sup>2</sup>Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." <sup>3</sup>So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. <sup>4</sup>He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

-----  
We find ourselves today in the thirty-second chapter of Exodus. So much has already happened. Moses has led the people out of Egypt and God has divided the Red Sea on their behalf. Let there be no doubt about it; the Hebrews were God's Chosen People. In our reading for today, we find the people at the base of Mount Sinai. Moses had ascended the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments and the people were waiting for his return. For some, waiting can be such a difficult thing. Verse one tells us

they waited a long time. Elsewhere in scripture, we are told he was gone for forty days and forty nights, the sacred time period. The people did not wait well. They become restless and go to Moses' older brother and spokesman, Aaron, to raise their concerns. There is no sign that they were concerned about Moses' safety. Instead, they are concerned with their well-being. Aaron should have known better. He tried to fill the void left by Moses with a golden calf. The calf bore a strong resemblance to the Egyptian bull-god Apis, who symbolized fertility and military might. Beyond our reading, sacrifices are made and a festival is given in honor of their new god, Aaron's calf.

The one issue about this story that shocks me is the people's forgetfulness. In less than forty days the people forgot about Moses. In less than forty days the people had forgotten about God. They thought the worst and dismissed Moses. They dismissed everything that God had done for them and started worshipping another. You can't excuse them on the basis of time. This was the generation who endured the hardship of Egyptian slavery. This was the generation who experienced and witnessed the plagues of Egypt. This was the generation who walked out of Egypt, free people. This was the generation who experienced the parting of the Red Sea. They saw so much, they experienced so much, but they forgot. What was wrong with them? What is wrong with us? We find it easy to forget life's most important things.

I am not talking about forgetting minor things in life. There are some things that are easily forgotten. I am not talking about forgetting where you parked your car at the mall. I am not talking about forgetting the milk at the grocery store. I am not talking about forgetting your sister-in-law's birthday. I am not even talking about where you left your keys or your cell phone. Let's be honest.

There are some things that should be forgotten. The time your child made a failed attempt at college. That was years ago and they learned from their mistake. They are now forty-two and are respected by their peers. They are a leader in the community. Why do you keep reminding them of that expensive mistake? They are now embarrassed by their immature behavior and want it to be forgotten. Just forget it and let your child evolve. They would do anything for you now. Or perhaps, there is your mistaken marriage. It was thirty years ago and everyone has forgotten about it but you. You replay it in your mind regularly. The truth is, your ex-spouse still has control over you. Let me give you some pastoral advice. Forget it and appreciate the people that love you now. Why can't you just forgive yourself? No one is perfect. Everyone makes mistakes. However, there are some things that should never be forgotten.

Much has been written about why the people forgot Moses and God. They are the same reasons we forget God today. Sometimes, people forget God because of arrogance or pride. They, themselves, are "God's gift to mankind" so there is no time left for God. There is no shortage of arrogance in our world. Sometimes, people forget God because of success or security. They simply don't need God in this world. I don't understand those people, because I need God more all the time. If you need God, then say, **"Amen!"** We must not be like those ancient Hebrews who forgot both Moses and God. We must always remember God.

Last night, Kathryn and I returned from a quick trip to Florida. It was a last second decision. We decided to go, and eight days later we were there. It filled a hole in my calendar that was created by our early Easter. We went to the same place we have gone to for years; Fort Myers Beach, Florida. The location is good. We are close to my sister-in-law Sue and my soon to be brother-in-law Dan Tucker, who live in North Naples. (They want to get married in Las Vegas by an Elvis impersonator.) We stayed at the same place we have been staying for years, The Lighthouse Resort. What made this trip special was we were alone. In the past, others traveled with us. My brother-in-law, Tom, once went with us. He didn't go this time. Our children once went with us. They now have their own lives and responsibilities. However, that didn't stop us from thinking about them. Every corner of The Lighthouse holds a memory for us. Over the years, we have stayed in nearly every room. In the pool, I used to scare my children by calling myself the king of the sea and pretending to drown them. At one end of the pool Sarah used to play the Little Mermaid on the steps. At the other end of the pool, Anna once won the hula-hoop contest. My brother-in-law Tom always rented the same room. The reason is simple. It was the cheapest room. He stayed there with his wife, Janine. Later, he stayed in the same room with his girlfriend, Cindy. My sister-in-law, Sue, first visited us with a guy named Gordon. He is remembered for his fancy socks. Then, she dated a tennis pro whose name escapes me. For the past fifteen years she has come with Dan. He is beyond description. It was fun to remember, but some things should never be forgotten.

On Wednesday afternoon, we were walking on the beach. My remembering turned deeper. I began to reflect. In other words, I began to evaluate my life to this point. What I discovered is what I had known the whole time. I have a good life. It has been quite a ride for a guy who was raised in a steel town in northeast Ohio. I started to remember all kinds of things. I remembered high school friends I haven't seen in years. I remembered my college loans I didn't think I would ever pay back. I remembered mailing the last check to pay them off. I remembered people who encouraged me. I remembered some sad dark days in my life. I remembered meeting the love of my life, who expanded my world from the very beginning. I remembered the first time I respected my children. I remembered the day I was introduced as pastor of this church. I remembered Maslow's hierarchy of human needs - there have been times when I was self-actualized. I remembered the day I accepted Jesus. I knew from the very beginning I was going to heaven. I worship a perfect Savior.

Next Monday, I will be 59 years old. It has been quite a ride. You can call it my wilderness experience. I am 100% sure God has always been with me. The ancient Hebrews may have forgotten about God, but I never will. I am not alone. You will never forget God. We will never forget God because He sent us a Savior who loves us so. As we come to this Communion table, may we remember Jesus' words, "Do this in remembrance of me". May we never forget.

Will you pray with me?