

March 8, 2017

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Scripture

Deuteronomy 9:13-21

¹³Furthermore the LORD said to me, "I have seen that this people is indeed a stubborn people. ¹⁴Let me alone that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and more numerous than they." ¹⁵So I turned and went down from the mountain, while the mountain was ablaze; the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. ¹⁶Then I saw that you had indeed sinned against the LORD your God, by casting for yourselves an image of a calf; you had been quick to turn from the way that the LORD had commanded you. ¹⁷So I took hold of the two tablets and flung them from my two hands, smashing them before your eyes. ¹⁸Then I lay prostrate before the LORD as before, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin you had committed, provoking the LORD by doing what was evil in his sight. ¹⁹For I was afraid that the anger that the LORD bore against you was so fierce that he would destroy you. But the LORD listened to me that time also. ²⁰The LORD was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him, but I interceded also on behalf of Aaron at that same time. ²¹Then I took the sinful thing you had made, the calf, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it thoroughly, until it was reduced to dust; and I threw the dust of it into the stream that runs down the mountain.

Devotional

In our reading for today, Moses comes down from the mountain carrying the two tablets of the covenant, only to discover that the Israelites have built a golden calf and are worshipping it. Perhaps we can understand why the people have done so: they had been wandering in the wilderness for many years and their future probably felt very uncertain. When Moses, their leader, disappeared to go talk with God, their fear and anxiety likely overwhelmed them, and this feeling may be what convinced them to create something tangible in which to place their faith and trust. God becomes angry with the people not because they felt fearful and anxious, but because they dealt with those feelings by making an idol for themselves instead of trusting God's promises. In this Lenten season of self-examination, we are challenged to look at our own lives and ask ourselves, When I am fearful and anxious, what idols am I tempted to worship? What statues do I need to destroy so that I can again place my faith in God alone?

Prayer

Merciful God, we thank you that even when you become angry with us for our sinful ways, you do not destroy us or cast us away from your presence. Instead, you continue to love us and welcome us back each time we stray. Help us to recognize those places in our lives where we are trusting in the wrong things, and bring us back into right relationship with you. Amen.