New Life Episcopal Church

Uniontown, Ohio



The Adoration of the Golden Calf

A Sermon for the 20th Sunday after Pentecost
October 11, 2026

Rev Barbara Bond

Proper 23, Year A

Exodus 32:1-14

The Golden Calf

Like little children and like most of us, the children of Israel delighted in shiny things. When Moses brought them liberation from the land of Egypt, they did not discard their gold, rather wore it in their ears as earrings, on their wrists as bracelets, wherever they could embellish their lives. Moses went up on the high mountain to talk to God about the people, and Moses was delayed. In Moses' absence, his brother Aaron asked the people to give up their shiny gold jewelry and give it to him, so that he could melt it down and make an idol, a golden calf. Then they had a big party and apparently misbehaved, shouting that the Golden Calf was the one who had brought them up from the land of Egypt. God was not pleased. God noticed these shenanigans going on down below, and God told Moses, up on the mountain, that these people were not worth God's attention and that therefore God was going to bring destruction on them. Moses pleaded for the people, and God grumped a bit but agreed not to destroy them.

The story continues in Exodus after our first reading. Moses goes down the mountain and asks his brother Aaron what the heck is going on. And wow, did Aaron tell a major whopper. He blamed it on the people. He said the people asked for a new god, and Aaron complied by taking all their gold jewelry, and throwing it in the fire. "And out came this calf!" Right.

The story doesn't end well – Moses smashes the tablets with the ten commandments written on them, Moses grinds up the golden calf and punishes the people for their worship of an idol., and Aaron is shown to have poor leadership skills.

We can learn a lot from this story, especially about our own weaknesses and attraction to shiny things. The last time I preached this text to you, I confessed my attraction to American Girl dolls – that I threw my gold into the fire and out came all these dolls!

The moral of the tale can be more serious than that. Ten years ago I preached this text at another parish. It was a prophetic sermon – that is, I told it like it was, in terms of poor parish leadership. They had mistaken money as more important than the human resources that were enriching them in other ways. In one fell swoop, they were dismissing their administrator, their sexton, and anyone else on the payroll, to save a dime. I challenged them that this was truly poor leadership and demonstrated the modern equivalent of worshipping the golden calf. This sermon did not go over well. Prophetic sermons rarely do.

This parish of New Life is not in that position at all. This community prizes its human resources, in each other and in its staff members. All of you pledge your gold to this

community of faith, valuing what we do, and asking what more you can do. This is the most generous parish I have ever served.

The biblical standard for contributions of the faithful is the tithe, that is, ten percent of your income. This is a number from the Old Testament, and it is meant as a guideline. But Jesus didn't ask us for ten percent. Jesus asked us for 100 percent! Give our lives to God wholeheartedly, however that plays out –monetarily, or in service to those less fortunate, or in serving here in our parish family. You require no goading – you do this all the time, expressing the natural generosity of your hearts. Today we will all join in a spiritual meal right here at the altar, and afterwards you will feed us all at Coffee Hour. Tonight we gather for another kind of worship in the manner of the Taize community, where we will join musical chants and light candles and pray together, quietly, to the accompaniment of classical guitar and leadership from Bo Iole. It is all beautiful – this morning in our eucharist, afterwards at the coffee hour tables, tonight in quiet meditation. You don't need reminders of how wonderful all this is.

And so, my friends, we have our weaknesses, but God understands all this and loves us, no exceptions. God rejoices in our worship and our loyalty to parish and our service to others. I thank you for being such a light to the world.