

Centre Street Congregational Church, UCC

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*What Holds You?*

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*Let us pray . . .*

As we continue in Exodus, my hope is that you've found the imagery and dialogues engaging. These Old or First Testament stories were created to point to the nature and character of God. In Judaism, God is a verb, an action word and God is also one with whom we are in partnership ~ co-creating and shaping the world together ~ and that's part of the point of the story between Moses and God.

You likely noticed that our lesson has 3 parts, and they read a little bit like a progression of holding. By holding, I mean the things that have a hold on us, the things that we hold onto and the bigger holding of presence to what its.

Nancy began with the first progression between the Israelites and Aaron. They have a limited understanding and vision; their memories are short. Moses? Who knows where he went and besides, they're tired of waiting for him, so come on Aaron! They say, "Come, make gods for us."

It's almost like a carefree party atmosphere focused solely on the here and now. The kids are outta control and it seems the only thing holding them is their need for instant gratification.

Lindsay shared the 2nd progression - God's furious with these unruly children — even shifts responsibility by calling them *Moses'* people — and God is ready to destroy them. Even wants his wrath to burn hot

against and consume them so he can begin anew with Moses, alone.

That would make life easier. And there's just no easy way to read these verses, because it seems disappointment, revenge and conditional love are holding God.

And finally, I read the third progression. Poor Moses. Talk about being between a rock and a hard place. He's been patient and dutiful, listening for and to God's direction and guidance for a long time now. Surely God didn't bring Moses and the Israelites this far, just to destroy the whole thing? So he appeals to God. I'm imagining Moses must have been quite fearful at this point. *Everything* is on the line. There's no where else to turn, so Moses appeals to God's character and says, "change your mind" and walking God down memory lane, Moses reminds God of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.

And God says okay. I won't destroy them.

And it is in Moses and God's partnership that we find there is room to hold the whole story.

Now, across the progression of each story line, despite departures on who is doing what, there is one common thread: and that is that the people were brought out of the land of Egypt. Of course, who did the bringing seems to be up for grabs:

With Israel's unruly children, they say, *These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!* giving credit to the object of their short and impatient attention span — the false god, the golden calf.

With God, well, he shifts credit back to Moses because he's angry. God says, *Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely* and so on and so forth.

And with Moses, he gives the credit back to God — saying, *your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt* reminding God how this was accomplished *with great power and with a mighty hand*.

So much holding across and throughout these verses.

Part of the beauty of this story is in its invitation for us to consider the places that have a hold on us. Places that can keep us small and focused on the newest shiny thing, to holding only if we're comfortable, to a vastness that can hold and be present to what is.

In contrast to that, we are also invited to consider how we are held across our lives.

So, what holds you? Are there places in your life that are held by instant gratification? Or anger? What about places of wisdom and understanding?

And what do you need liberating from? Because, while they may have manipulated some of the details, as we noticed, the one thing the Israelites, God and Moses all knew at their core was that Moses and his people — God's people — had been freed.

So where are the places that hold you captive? What do you need to be freed from?

And in and through all the stories across your life, where do you hold onto your partnership with God? Because it is the constancy of that partnership which helps complete the equation, delivering us from the variables into a freedom that does not get measured by this world. It's not short-lived, nor shaped by our emotions.

It's that partnership, that holding that brings about the Kingdom or the nearness of God. And while I do not believe we have a wrathful God, the hyperbole through the storytelling does make the point that we have a

God who has a kind of crazy passion for us and whose preference is to partner with us in co-creating our way through life.

It's why you often hear me pray that we hear God's voice above all others and hear me preach that you can count on the constancy of God.

And it is our separation from working *with* God that perhaps makes the world look like it is full of God's wrath: Climate change, the pandemic, unchecked greed, endless productivity and anxiety, massive wealth inequality, white supremacy. It is, as I like to say, a long and gruesome list.

Like all relationships, the one we have with God takes work. Last week we talked about the importance of a Sabbath. It's central to our relationship with God and our relationship with each other. And perhaps most of all, it's central to growing our own souls because a regular

sabbath helps us to create a center that can hold because a sabbath is intentional time spent resting in God.

So beloveds, as you begin this new week, my prayer for you is that you reflect on what you hold onto and what has a hold on you. Let God help you let go of the things that keep you and God separated.

And above all else, I pray you let yourselves be held in the fierce love of God ~ a love that can hold you like nothing else.

Amen