

My good friend Phil Baker defined a god as that which takes our time, devotion, goal and purpose of life. And then told us that his brown Pomeranian dog, Spike, must be his god.

Though he jokes, the definition holds true. Our passions and interests, the things we trust for security – are our god idols.

Even if we can't or don't admit our idols, they stare us in the face. The things we turn to, when we believe that God has forgotten us, or failed us.

Power.

Technology.

Country.

Military.

Government.

Sports.

Money – oh, money – because where we put money, is where our hearts will follow – from the mouth of Jesus.

When we try to justify how we can love both “Jesus and blank,” we have already broken the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment. When we try and make God fit our ideologies or politics, we worship a different God than the one who created us in God's image.

We worship and follow idols that are not God. It has been true since the Garden of Eden, and God's people worshipped knowledge, and being like God.

Just some of our false idols.

Given all that...I am not sure the Golden Calf is a false idol.

Or at least it was not intended that way.

**If not, than what is it? What do you think it is?**

The people ask Aaron to make Elohim, Lord, God. That is the golden calf. The Israelites didn't demand a different God. They just wanted a God they could see, and worship, and hold. They wanted an image of the God who brought them out of Egypt. And they were tired of waiting for Moses.

The people were fickle, giving up on Moses as a leader – and turn to Aaron. Who, by the way, put up no resistance to crafting a golden calf. He collected the gold, and led the charge.

It is an odd choice maybe, but Aaron wasn't making a foreign god for the Israelites to follow; he was using a familiar symbol to make a physical representation of the LORD.

Rolf Jacobson, a professor at Luther stated it this way.

**This is not an image of a false God...it is a false image of the true God.**

So, what are our false images of the true God today.

**What golden calves do we worship, because they seem like God?**

We can look around any church building, the building “God’s House” itself is a golden calf.

Our church budgets become our goal and purpose, stealing our time and energy.

Our cemeteries, become church idols.

Our artwork and sculptures – try to represent God – but are not God and cannot describe God fully.

Our bibles have become artifacts that we put on a pedestal.

Our pastors – are worshipped – people leaving or coming based on who stands in the pulpit–

Should church participation really be more about the pastor than about serving God?

Human leaders, human traditions, the baptismal font or communion table, statues, any ideas that can’t be touched, any and all attachment to our worship paraphernalia – are sacred cows. They may make represent God, but they aren’t God.

I don't think any of you bow down and worship Jesus the statue...if so, we should probably talk.

But –for centuries, we have made our image of Jesus - the way we want, in order to grasp ahold of this God who cannot be contained. In most movies, picture bibles, paintings – Jesus is northern European – which besides being historically inaccurate, also doesn't represent us, our church very well.

In Bible Study this week we talked a bit about this topic and there was a comment I loved - when we narrow Jesus down, box him in by our image of him– it diminishes the universal message of Jesus.

Maybe we relate to white Jesus – but the world is full of Christians who cannot – and what once was meant to enhance worship, now has become a roadblock to worship. We have a hard time seeing our created images as false images of the true God. But that is exactly what they have become.

Even our worship service itself, in many ways is an idol. Where worship is all about how it makes us feel, we have flipped the direction and purpose of worship.

Chris Rowland from Oxford University, writes “when worship becomes an escape from life and from witness, it has lost touch with God. If worship is merely an anesthetic for the hurt of life, rather than discipline for an alternative way of life, worship has moved away from God’s purposes. True worship leads us to do the works of God.”

With our loins girded, to go and serve the Lord, and the community.

If our Sunday worship is primarily for ourselves, we may be worshipping the act of worship, instead of God.

Whew, it doesn’t seem like there is much grace good news in this story. Huh?

A story about how we have broken commandments, and even in our best effort to worship, we fall into holding on to idols, without always knowing it. A story about how we have abused the freedom that God has given to us in this relationship with our creator.

God all along knew what was happening with the people. God allowed Moses to respond. As angry and sad as God was with the people, God walked beside them, raised up Moses to lead them. Moses’ plea and a prayer didn’t change God’s mind, but changed Moses’ attitude towards the people, shaping him, so he could help lead his people. God’s people.

Because, God's covenant to us never fails.

God's promise wins - in the midst of conflict and oppression, even in rebellion, and our sinful acts and brokenness.

Forgive them for they do not know what they do – Jesus says.

God has set us free from all those things, from our worship of false gods and false images of the true God. To free us for loving God.

God is passionate in God's love for us, and faithfulness to creation. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – is why we have church all. Why we can worship our God at all.

The One to whom we give our time, devotion, goal and purpose. Amen.