

Sunday, October 15, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Bible Study
“Stiff-Necked People”
Exodus 32:1-14 and Matthew 22:1-14

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “If you were hosting a party, who would you want to invite? What about these people makes you want to include them?”

Exodus 32:1-14. Context. After God pronounced the first set of stipulations for covenant relationship (commonly known as the “Ten Commandments”), the people begged to be dismissed from God’s presence, finding it too much to bear. Moses heard the rest of what God had to say about how they should to live with God and each other, and then told it to the rest of them. They gladly agreed to abide by the provisions of God’s covenant. Shortly after that, God invited Moses up the mountain to receive the tablets of stone containing the covenant. Moses remained on the mountain for 40 days and nights, leaving his brother Aaron and the rest of the people to their own devices.

Matthew 22:1-14. Context. This week’s reading is the third in a series of three parables that in Matthew’s version Jesus used specifically to condemn the Jewish leaders who rejected him and sought to kill him. The first two have in view the leaders of Jesus’ day, and the third has in view the leaders of Matthew’s day following the destruction of Jerusalem. Again, Matthew has transformed Jesus’ original parable (see the version in Luke 14:15-24) into an allegory. So, in this version the invited guests who refuse to come (=Jews who reject God’s word, namely the Jewish leaders) abuse and kill the slaves (=prophets) of the king (=God) who come to remind them that it’s time for the wedding banquet (=the messianic age/kingdom of God). In response, the king destroys their city (=Jerusalem). Then slaves (=now, evangelists) bring to the banquet all whom they find, good and bad (as in the church). But the one without a wedding robe (=one who has responded but who is not “clothed” with the deeds of true Christian living) is cast into the outer darkness (=the last judgment).

Read Exodus 32:1-14

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

Read Matthew 22:1-14

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the text?

Read Exodus 32:1-14 again

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Read Matthew 22:1-14 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- Read Exodus 32:1-14 aloud in your group. What were the people of God looking for in this golden calf? Where do you find people today looking for guidance and comfort today?
- Moses intercedes on behalf of the Israelites, asking God not to destroy them. What does this tell us about Moses? How does this inform us as leaders in churches/communities of faith?
- Exodus 32:14 has the astonishing sentence, “And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.” In this week’s Preaching Notes, we read, “*You can say all you want about God really just testing Moses and seeing what Moses would do if God ‘pretended’ to be angry enough to destroy the people. But the text says, ‘God changed his mind.’*” What does this tell us about the nature and character of God?
- In our Matthew passage this week, we hear that some wedding guests refuse the king’s invitation to the banquet. What does this parable tell us about God’s invitation to us today? How do we refuse God’s invitation as well?
- Matthew 22:9 tells us of the king's directive, “Go therefore into the main streets and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” What does this tell us about God’s invitation today to others? How do we welcome those whom society might overlook?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

God of mercy and love, your nature is to show mercy and love to all of us. Forgive us when we seek to find guidance and power from the idols we create in this world and help us turn to you – the one with compassionate power. Invite us in, even though we are unworthy, Almighty God, and may we have the wisdom to accept your gracious invitation. In Jesus' name, we pray, **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.