

How many times have you given up on something and tossed it to the side? It is a part of humanity – to look at something that has become a mess and then walk away. I have done it with woodworking projects, when, in attempting to build something, I make some bad cuts and things become crooked and I just take the pieces and use them as a fire starter. All the while thinking to myself, “I’ll just pretend that never happened.”

Even more so, relationships become so difficult and messy that it seems easier to walk away than to go through the work of reconciliation. Or, when it comes to one’s interior life, to give up on changing a habit or starting something new. Why not forget the whole attempt and walk away?

Walking away from God because of great disappointment or sorrow is common. The institution of the Church has scandals, I will walk away. Some form of suffering or loss has made you doubt that God is loving. One can walk away disappointed.

This human attitude of forgetting and starting new with something else is at the heart of the first reading from Exodus. A few weeks ago, we heard the account of Abraham bargaining with God over how many innocent living in Sodom would save the city from destruction. I asked the question, who is changing during this negotiation? Is it God or Abraham? We hear the same thing happening today between God and Moses. The Israelites have just been freed from slavery, saved from the vengeance of Pharaoh by crossing the Red Sea, and are camped at the base of Mount Sinai while Moses receives the Ten Commandments. And while Moses was talking to God, the people, led by Moses’ own brother built a golden idol shaped like a calf – a golden calf which was one of the Egyptian deities. Moses comes down and sees this betrayal of God, led by Aaron, Moses’ own brother, and comes back to God disgusted.

God then says to Moses, “Let me destroy this people and I will create a new nation from your offspring.” Now, it is important to remember that all throughout Moses’ time leading the people of Israel, he complains to God about how much the Israelites are driving him crazy. Moses spends a lot of time angry with the Israelites. In this case, though, God tells Moses that the Israelites are more trouble than they are worth, I want to start over. Moses responds passionately, saying, “Remember your promises to your people. Remember how faithful you are. Remember you are God.” Then God relents and allows Moses to go and discipline the Israelites.

The question comes around again, Is God changing his mind, or is Moses learning to become more like God? I believe this describes a change in Moses. In order to lead the Israelites, he must love them enough to put their needs before his own. He must love them enough to not walk away.

God does not give up and walk away from us. We might run away, shake our fist in anger, make a complete mess of our life, but God does not give up and abandon us. What Moses pleads for, faithfulness, is who God is.

Jesus, in the parables today, expands this vision. God is more than faithful, God searches and chases after us when *we* walk away. The parables of the shepherd looking for the one lost sheep, the woman turning her house upside down for a coin worth almost nothing, and the forgiving father of the prodigal son, these are the images Jesus uses to describe God's heart. It is the father, waiting every day for the son to return from his sinful life – waiting, running, embracing, and rejoicing at his son's return. It is the exact opposite of walking away and starting something else. God does not abandon a mess. Rather, God reaches down and pulls us back up, if we only will grasp onto his hand.

We come to resemble the Father who loves us when we stay faithful and refuse to walk away from a mess. What is your challenge? Is there a relationship that needs reconciliation, a habit that needs to be started or stopped, or are you wavering in pursuing a life of prayer with God? God does not walk away from you. By God's great mercy, we can also be faithful.