Exodus 32:8 They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf.

 So what is your golden calf? Sounds like a strange question to ask, doesn’t it? But in truth, as I have grown and matured as a Christian and in my understanding of God’s Word I have learned that all of us, many of us have golden calves in our lives. Let me explain.

 So what is a golden calf? Well, it is something that you have exalted or put in front of the Lord your God. It is something, it can be anything that in your life displaces or replaces the Lord. Here is the interesting part. I believe that you and I, when we have these golden calves of ours, we are very much like the Jewish people of old. I believe that many of them did not grasp the true impact of what they did. That’s because as I study this history, I believe many of them did not grasp the wretched nature of their hearts and in failing to do that, they did not grasp the wonder, awe and grace of the God, the true God that had entered into their lives. It may be that we suffer the same foolish problem. Let’s contemplate this more as we look at our text under the theme: **THE GOLDEN CALF. 1st. An act of foolish faith. 2nd. The failure of foolish hearts. 3rd. Turn to the Lord!**

 While I am sure that this history is familiar to all of you let me just highlight this history to make sure you grasp everything. The Jews, as a people have now been living in Egypt ever since the days of Joseph. By simple calculation they have been in Egypt for the past 400 years. Although they have been told and told that they belonged in Canaan, the land of promise from the Lord, I doubt at this point, that many of them cared. That’s why in the last 100 years or so of this stay God brought it about that the Jews became the slaves, the mistreated slave of Egypt. All so God could change their hearts and make them want to go, to leave for the Promised Land.

 We know how God brought that about. It is the history of Moses where it is clear Moses is groomed to be the human leader who will work at getting them to the Promised Land. Now, just think of everything these people experienced once Moses the 80 year old leader showed up in Egypt the champion of God. The miracles that were done: the personal miracles Moses had, the Ten Plagues upon Egypt, the plundering of Egypt as Pharaoh sets them free, the pillar of cloud and fire that lead them, the Lord fighting for them, the crossing of the Red Sea, hearing the very voice of God themselves before Mt. Sinai and so many other wonders and signs that the Lord God, the real God was with them. Take all of that into account.

 And now Moses, at the command of God, goes up Mt. Sinai to receive directly from the hand of God the written commands of God. Here is the sad part. Within a week or so, the people go to Aaron, the brother of Moses and commission the golden calf. They collect the gold in the camp, set up a mold, cast the idol and declare that this golden calf is now their god! Idolatry at its finest!

 Now, in all fairness let me make a few points. I don’t know how much of the true God and the nature of the true God these people had been taught or even knew over the last years. Remember these people and their descendants have been in Egypt for 400 years! No doubt they have been influenced by the gods, the false gods of Egypt, particularly the calf god Apis of Egypt. These people have mostly grown up with a history of God but no actual proof that this God was any better than other gods. Until recently. Then this true God shows up with power and miracles galore to bring them to Mt. Sinai. This True God has very specifically commanded the people: Do not worship other Gods! Do not make idols, any images of creature or man and consider this God! Pow! That is exactly what they do. Somehow they have convinced themselves that this idol, this golden calf can be and should be the very representation of the God they want to worship despite God saying, “Don’t do that!”

 What is the problem? The problem is foolish faith. The problem is that these people, influenced by the world, can’t seem to grasp the concept and nature of the true God. They can’t seem to grasp that God is God! That God is what He says He is and that they as humans, cannot and are not to alter, change, or accept anything less than what God himself has revealed. Foolish faith! As men, they think god is what they want. That they can make god serve them, to give them what they imagine, to satisfy the desires of their souls and hearts, that god is what they say instead of what He says. Foolish faith. Because finally, if God is not the Almighty, all-knowing, present everywhere, Creator who has revealed himself clearly and precisely to us and will accept no other imagined god, then what is the point of God? It is an insult to God to make him less than He is. It is an insult to God to declare He cannot do as He says. It is an insult to God to decide He has not clearly and precisely revealed Himself to us. Such is the nature of foolish faith.

 I fear that we too can suffer from such foolish faith. To live our lives in such a way that really no longer upholds and honors the true God. That we decide in our hearts that we can shape and mold God to be what we want instead of what He says. We decide his Son is not important. We decide to be content with reading sermons or watching videos rather than actually being in Church as God encourages. We decide that God’s laws and revelations are old fashioned and not worthy of our lives. We decide that God is no longer our pilot, not even our co-pilot and without realizing we have tossed Him to the side of the road as we drive on. Such is the nature of foolish faith! A faith that doesn’t trust and hope in the truth and reality of God.

 I wish we could say that from this point on the people had a change of heart. But such is not true. Please note that God at this point, with perfect and righteous justice toys with the idea of getting totally rid of this group and starting again with the descendants of Moses. But, and here is the neat thing, God’s idea is to show these people his grace and love. That’s why he shares with Moses these thoughts, so that Moses, as God knew he would, would plead for God’s grace and mercy, would plead that God forgive this wickedness solely because He is God. Do you see that in this section? Moses actually appeals to God’s nature as God, to God’s goodness and love, his compassion and care. In a way, Moses reminds God that these are His people because He made them so. It is an awesome lesson on the true nature and wonder of God for the people. You have done this great evil, but God will forgive you and God of his love will keep you as His special people.

 All of this is done that the people grasp the forgiving, gracious goodness of the Lord God. But they don’t. This same group will in a matter of months, refuse to enter the land of Canaan. They will refuse to trust in God for victory and help. They have seen and experienced firsthand God’s wonder and marvel and still they will reject and despise the Lord God. It is for this reason, this unbelief, this failure of their foolish hearts to grasp the grace of God, that this generation will die off in the wilderness and will not inherit or enter into the Promised Land. And do note that the Book of Hebrews makes is clear that they do not get into heaven because of their stubborn and foolish unbelief. It is so sad that foolish hearts fail to grasp God’s grace.

 I have seen this foolishness even today. People who just seem to have no regard for the Lord despite the goodness and wonder God has blessed them with in their lives. They want to consider themselves God’s people but they have no regard for God and his Word. When it comes to their hearts, God is like in 4th or 5th place, if not lower. Everything else is more important. What they think is more important. What they feel is more important. How they see things is more important even though we humans have the worst vision there is. It is the foolishness of the world that simply refuses to let God be God and to grasp that God is gracious, kind and loving, willing to forgive and renew just because He so cares for us. Like the Israelites of old, somewhere along the line the decision is made that God is what I decide rather than God is what He says and reveals in His Word.

 So what is it we are to learn? First, learn the gracious goodness of God. God had every right, perfect justice on his side to do away with this unbelieving group and yet God in grace and love gave them chance after chance after chance. And in truth, if God would have made more descendants from Moses, well, his promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would still be true and kept. God shows us his grace and love. God shows us his patience and compassion. God shows a willingness to overlook our sins and forgive our iniquities just because finally and ultimately we are willing to trust and believe in God as God!

 True even today. Think of how God has showered His love in your life. He has sent His Son Jesus to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins, not because we earn that but because God loves us and wants us to be with Him in heaven. Think of how Jesus suffered and died for our sins. He did this even though it was His own people shouting out in unbelief, “Crucify him, crucify!” Jesus on the cross pleaded to His father for their forgiveness. Do we not grasp God’s love in Jesus? Do we not see his compassion in this Savior who died and rose for us? Do we not understand our deep need for God’s forgiveness and love, for God’s guidance and wisdom, for God’s grace and salvation?

 That’s why my plea this morning is, “Turn to the Lord.” Get rid of those golden calves in your life. Those things that you make more important than God, that you treasure more than God that in reality have become your god in utter foolishness. I have seen and witnessed God thrown over for sex, love, money, goods, convenience, for….well, the list is really pretty endless. Sometime we too are just like the people of old. We let our foolish hearts lead us to a foolish faith. We put God on the far, far back burner and tell Him that’s what He will just have to take if He wants to be in our lives! It is foolishness! Blind, misguided, deceived and the wide road of foolishness.

 So the call goes out to repent. To turn anew to the Lord and his gracious love. As God relented and did not bring the disaster he had threatened on these people, so God will relent and forgive us our wrongs and sins against Him. He so loves us. He is so willing to continue to teach and guide, to lead us to the depths of his wisdom and fathom the wonder of his love. He is so patient and kind in our lives. His call is simple and sure. Repent! Turn to Me! Put aside your foolish faith, your confidence in your golden idols and believe in the true and loving God! Know what My Son has done for you. Know that though you are “the chief of sinners” yet will He forgive and call you to follow. God’s plea is for your heart to believe in Him. Remember, God even tells us that angels rejoice over even one sinner who repents!

 Golden calves? Yes, I confess I have had some. As I have learned, repent and cast these foolish things aside. I pray that God will continue to guide and keep all of us in the truth of His Word. That we will cast aside those idols of our hearts and simply and faithfully believe in His love and grace. May our Lord’s love, especially as revealed in the Savior Jesus be our foundation and heart. Amen.