

Letting our Minds be Changed
A Sermon on Matthew 1:18-25 and Exodus 32 by the Rev. Philip Major
St. Paul's ~ Syracuse, NY ~ December 21, 2025

You and I are in mutual relationships with God. A mutual relationship is the opposite of a relationship of domination. A dictator who sends secret police into cities to terrorize people has created a relationship of domination with the people who live in fear.

Our relationships with God are mutual. There is a back and forth to our relationships with God. This is what we learn from the Bible.

The stories of the Bible are stories where we see people listening, and sometimes not listening, to what God is telling them. Some people hear what is being said, while others refuse to hear what God is saying. In the Bible some people turn to God for help in their time of need, and other people don't, but what God desires is always the same. God desires to be in a mutual relationship with the people.

In the Bible, God speaks to the people, often in ways they do not expect. Sometimes the people pay attention to what God is saying. Sometimes the people change their minds based on what they have heard.

That's what happened with Joseph. Joseph had a plan. His plan was to be married to this young woman, named Mary. *But before they lived together, Mary was found to be pregnant. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.* This sounds so much like life as we experience it. We make one plan, and then it doesn't happen. So, like Joseph, we make a second plan. Joseph's second plan was to divorce Mary quietly. Joseph's plan was to end their relationship, but to do it quietly.

But just when Joseph had resolved to end his engagement to Mary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

Joseph let his mind be changed, and it became the turning point of the story. It's the turning point in Joseph's story and the turning point in Mary's story. And it's the turning point in God's story. There are many places in the Bible where we come across a description of God changing God's mind about one thing or another.

The story of the Golden Calf from Exodus 32 is a story of God changing God's mind. You may have heard it before, but allow me to read a few verses: *So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. Aaron took the gold earrings and formed them in a mold, and cast an image of a calf, and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" ...*

At this time Moses was having a conversation with God, up on the mountain. *God said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it... "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now leave me alone so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them! But of you, Moses, I will make of you a great nation."*

But Moses implored the LORD and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?... Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. And then the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

I know, I'm leaving the good parts out of the story, like where Moses grinds the Golden Calf into dust and makes the people drink the gold dust! But for today let's focus our attention on this verse. *Then the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people. This is the God of the Bible. Moses convinced God to change his mind. Moses wasn't the only one. Abraham also*

convinced God to change course. Amos also convinced God to change his mind. The people of the city of Ninevah convinced God to not destroy them and their city.

In the Bible, God lets his mind be changed by the words and actions of God's people. Letting our minds be changed is a sacred activity. This is the point of the story of Joseph and the angel from Matthew chapter one. Joseph lets his mind be changed by what he has heard, and through this, the birth of divine love in the person of Christ Jesus came one step closer to reality.

Letting our minds be changed is a sacred activity. When we let our minds be changed, we are doing the same thing God does in the Bible. God lets Moses make his argument. God listens, and eventually changes his mind.

God has created in you in the image of God. God has given you all of these wonderful powers that come from God. God has given you the power to be creative. You can create something beautiful out of chaos, the way God makes beauty out of chaos.

God has given you the power of intelligence and the power to choose. You can choose to do the right thing. You can choose to be merciful, the same way God chooses to be merciful. In our ability to be merciful, in our ability to choose to do the right thing, you and I know we have been created in the image of God.

God has given you the greatest power of all, which is the power to love. God has given you the power to love someone who often do not act in loveable ways, just as God loves some people who often do not act in loveable ways. In our ability to love the person who acts in unloveable ways, we see we have been created in the image of God.

God has given you the power to listen. You can choose to listen, the same way God listened to Moses, and Moses listened to God, and Joseph listened to the angel. In our ability to listen, we see we have been created in the image of God.

God has also given you the ability to let your mind be changed. You can let your mind be changed, the same way Joseph let his mind be changed, the same way God lets God's mind be changed. In our ability to let our minds be changed, we see we have been created in the image of God.

As we begin a new year with God, I wonder if there is some way God is inviting us to let our minds be changed? As you begin a new year in your life with God, I wonder if there is some way God is inviting you to let your mind be changed?

We give thanks for people who are willing to listen and let their minds changed. We return to the God whose primary desire is to be in relationships of mutual respect with us. We return to the God who empowers us to be creative and to listen. We return to the God who empowers us to be merciful and to love those who sometimes act in unloveable ways. We return to the God who empowers us to let our minds be changed. Thanks be to God!