This past week I was privileged to travel with my parents on a cruise that visited New England and Canada. I am very grateful for the time away to be with my family as we celebrated my parents’ 48th wedding anniversary. Thank you, God, for the financial resources we had, and to Chaplains Gore and Cash who know how very important it is to spend time with our families and recharge our spiritual batteries.

I learned an important aspect of myself while on the cruise, one that was not very pleasing. You see, 95% of the people I work with are significantly younger than me. And so I was under the false assumption that I was a fairly patient person. On this cruise, there were about the 2500 passengers on board, not including the crew. And I was about 30 years younger than average age of most of them. You see, we are not obedient when it’s convenient to behave ourselves. We are obedient when we behave ourselves in the midst of inconvenience. Maybe you can relate. The Lord convicted me, I repented, but he still made it clear that I have much growing to do in the patience department.

The Israelites also experienced a similar conviction when they were impatient and raced ahead of God, only the consequences were much greater. If you've been following our study through Exodus, you'll remember that the Israelites were enslaved by the Egyptians, they managed to escape captivity, and Moses was their leader who was guiding them toward the land God promised to them. In the long meantime, however, they were nomads, a tribal people who had no permanent place to call home.

The Israelites were like an eight-year-old kid on a long car trip. “Are we there yet?” If there's anything worse that slowly plodding along toward an unknown destination countless miles down the road, it’s coming to a full stop with countless miles ahead.

It was during this time that Moses said, “OK everybody, I'm just going to stop at this gas station and ask for directions...” Oh wait, wrong story. Okay, so Moses told the people, “You wait here. I am going up on the mountain to talk with God, and I’ll come back down and tell you what he said.” Moses went up on the mountain. There were flashes of lightning and bellowing thunder. He came back, his face aglow, and everyone heard as Moses read the 10 commandments and everyone pledged to obey all the Lord had said. Then Moses went back up to get more instruction from the Lord. The cloud of the Lord’s presence covered the mountain. It was like a devouring fire. They were happy to wait and hear what Moses had to say. They sat at the foot of the mountain and waited. And waited.

They were at a standstill in the desert waiting for Moses on whom they were completely dependent. And he had been gone for over a month. In faith they followed him. In faith they
committed to obey all the word he said God had given him up on the mountain. In faith, they were now here waiting.

Something must have happened. Maybe Moses died. In any case, they were done waiting. The mob confronted Moses' brother, Aaron, who was second in command. They said, “We don’t know what’s happened to Moses. So, you make a god for us.”

Aaron collected everyone’s gold and fashioned a calf that, ironically, looked like Egypt’s sacred bull and Canaan’s fertility gods. Later on when Moses confronted him for being directly responsible for violating the first two of the Ten Commandments, here's what Aaron had to say, “I dropped the gold in the fire and this calf popped out.” (Exodus 32:24)

If this wasn't such a heretical situation, I would think that this is the funniest line in all of scripture. It makes me want to ask, "Is that your final answer, Aaron?" Because he was obviously not the brightest bulb in the pack. In other words, he was a few fries short of a Happy Meal. And the Israelites wrestled with their fate and they set him up to be their scapegoat.

Now remember, God gave the Ten Commandments so his people would have peace, order, and prosperity. But they created an idol and threw a party! The original language indicates that this was a self-indulgent party...not the kind of celebration where the one true God was worshipped.

God was raging with righteous anger because he saw everything they did. God loves us too much to ignore us. He doesn’t always intercede the way we want Him to or when we want Him to. But he always sees us. He’s always aware of our lives and interested in our lives. Because of this act, he was furious.

God told Moses, “Go down at once! Your people… (When he recruited Moses for this job, he called Israel “My people.” Now, they’ve messed up, and they are Moses’ people.) 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, and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt! ...I have seen how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.’” (32:7-10).

Moses saw where God was headed with this train of thought and he didn’t like it. He remembered when his ancestors were stuck in sin, but God saved Noah and his family because of their obedience while the rest of the earth was destroyed by a flood. Moses didn’t want to have any part of that. So like an effective Naval or Marine Corps officer, Moses respectfully approached God and advised him of the disadvantages of his plan.

Hear what he says: “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? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and
do not bring disaster on your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’“

By the way, while this isn't the specific focus of today's message, this should give us great hope because God heard Moses and changed his mind. The Israelites were still punished, but God's wrath turned away from them. There are many lessons within this chapter - Exodus 32 - the danger of idol worship, the power of prayer, leadership lessons, but for today, let's focus on what we can learn from their experience, particularly when it pertains to waiting.

First, a big part of our faith is waiting. What we do while we wait reveals what kind of faith we have. The Israelites went through some pretty crazy experiences on their way to the Promised Land. But, they also saw evidence of God unlike most people throughout history. They knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God was in control, that he heard their prayers, and that he loved them. They knew it, but it wasn’t enough. They wanted to dictate the terms of the relationship. They got impatient and broke the very first two rules God gave - no other gods before him and no graven images. Instead of trusting God they decided to displace God. God responded with harsh punishment because His loving heart for them had been rejected.

Thousands of years later, after Jesus rose from the grave, and ascended to Heaven, the disciples huddled together in Jerusalem and waited. For 40 days, they waited – the same amount of time the Israelites waited at the foot of the mountain. But the disciples didn’t create a golden calf; they prayed. And after 40 days, at Pentecost, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. A big part of our faith is waiting.

We also recognize, in this passage, that God is real dynamic, unpredictable, relational, passionate, and interested in us. God knows what’s going on in our lives. He wants us to turn our attention off ourselves and toward Him. I can't help but wonder how often we frustrate ourselves by waiting for God to do something when he's just waiting for us to respond to him.

What we do, how we spend our waiting time, has an impact on the life we have with God. Those who grow in faith through prayer and worship in times of uncertainty will be filled with God's love. Those who dismiss God and reject Him will be punished. I think most of the time he simply lets us suffer the consequences of his absence and our own mistakes. What if God had done nothing with the Israelites when they made that calf? They would have been overrun by Egypt or enslaved by one of the other nomadic tribes. As rough as their punishment seems, when it ended, they were still God’s people headed to the Promised Land. I believe the reason it went that way is as angry as God was, he still loved them.

Sometimes, we have to wait upon the Lord. What are you waiting for today? Some of you are waiting for a loved one to return from deployment. Some of us are waiting for loved ones to experience a personal relationship with God. Some of you are waiting for a doctor's report. A few of you are waiting for graduation. The period of waiting is our opportunity to worship, pray, and grow. When we take that opportunity we are ready for whatever God has next. Even as we
wait, he sees, he loves, and he plans great things for us, far more than we could ever ask or imagine. Together, in faith and trust, let us wait upon the Lord.

Let us pray: Gracious God, there’s so much waiting in life. We wait in lines, we wait for others, we wait for financial security, we wait for a doctor’s report, we wait for love, we wait for pain to go away and we even wait for heaven. Sometimes the waiting erodes our joy and fills us with dread. Give us the grace to refrain from rushing ahead in order to bring waiting to an end. Instead, let us find joy in the waiting itself. In the name of Christ we are privileged to pray. Amen.