

“The Haunted House Within”

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Series: *Exodus*

Bible Text: Exodus 32

Preached on: December 28, 2025

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Let me invite you to please turn to the book of Exodus, chapter 32. We're going to be reading several verses, verses one through 20. And you may remember a few weeks ago, Hobie preached on Exodus 33. So we're rewinding the tape a little bit. But if you comb through the book of Exodus, or you're familiar with it, chapters 25 through 31, God explains in great detail the structure by which his people will meet with him, how they are to worship him, how they are to come into his presence. And this is a profound irony, considering our present text that we are about to read. Because while Moses is on top of the mountain, hearing in very vivid detail how God has provided for his people, so they may come into his presence, you may remember down at the bottom of the mountain, his people are taking the initiative to decide on their own terms how they are going to worship. And so this text meets us this morning at a particular moment. Christmas is now behind us. Some of you may have what is referred to as the Christmas blues. The candles have been blown out. The songs are maybe a little bit different. The saxophone has come out. The calendar has turned, right? We're approaching the new year. But Christmas, if I could just continue to reach back a little bit, over this last month we've been talking about the God who has come near to us. The word became flesh and dwelt among us, John 1. And Exodus 32 reminds us that even after God draws near, our hearts, as we have even confessed this morning in worship, they are prone to wander. Knowing this, hear from God's word.

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. So Aaron said to them, take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me. So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, these are your gods, oh Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord. And they rose early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. And the Lord said to Moses, go down for your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They

have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, these are your gods, oh Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And the Lord said to Moses, I have seen this people and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore, let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them in order that I may make a great nation of you. But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, oh Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people? Whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand. Why should the Egyptians say with evil intent did he bring them out to kill them in the mountains and consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from your burning anger and relent this disaster against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, your servants to whom you swore by your own self and said to them, I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and all this land that I have promised, I will give to your offspring and they shall inherit it forever. And the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people. Then Moses turned and went down to the mountain with the two tablets of testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides on the front and on the back. They were written. The tablets were the work of God and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets. When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, there is a noise of war in the camp. But he said it is not the sound of shouting for victory or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear. And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and dancing, Moses' anger burned hot and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it into powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it. And Moses said to Aaron, what did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them? And Aaron said, let not the anger of my Lord burn hot. You know the people that they are set on evil. For they said to me, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, this man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. So I said to them, let any who have gold take it off. So they gave it to me and I threw it into the fire and out came this calf. And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose for Aaron had let them break loose to the derision of their enemies, then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, he was on the Lord's side. Come to me and all the sons of Levi gather around him. And he said to them, thus says the Lord God of Israel, put your sword on your side, each of you and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp. And each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor. And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell. And Moses said, today you have been ordained for service of the Lord, each one at the cost of his son and of his brothers, so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day. The next day, Moses said to the people, you have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord. Perhaps I can make an atonement for your sin. So Moses returned to the Lord and said, alas, this people have sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now if you will forgive their sin, but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written. But the Lord said to Moses, whoever is sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. But now go lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you. Behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them. Then the Lord sent a plague on the people because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Would you pray with me?

Jesus, there's no one else to whom we may turn. You have the words of eternal life. And as these scriptures are spread before us, Father, I plead, I ask that you would send your Holy Spirit to us, that we might hear in them your Holy Word, that we would hear your voice and that we would believe in the gospel. That we might receive your grace and live for your glory. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, Merry Christmas. Happy upcoming New Year. I want to talk about Halloween. I've always looked forward to Halloween. I've gotten flack for that many days. The guy who's in ministry that likes haunted houses and costumes and candy, we know those are the things that are attributed to it. But I guess for me, I love the low commitment of Halloween. The low commitment that is not found maybe as much in Thanksgiving and Christmas. Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to throw shade at Thanksgiving or Christmas. I love those holidays, but I really do enjoy Halloween, especially now having children. I love the movie Ghostbusters. I love Beetlejuice. While living in Rome, Georgia, we moved from Rome, Georgia here to Clarksville. We had our very own haunted house. In recent years in Rome, Georgia, that place has become infamous for the haunted house from the movie Stranger Things. It's called the Creel House, where the monster Vecna resides. Locals call this house the Claremont House. Hobie had told me in between services he thought that he had stayed there with Hannah, and I was like, I'm pretty sure you didn't. But one of the producers of the show commented on the architecture that drew them to this specific house. And he said, the house, a second empire Victorian mansion with a mansard roof, had such a uniquely imposing air that we committed to traveling nearly two hours to shoot practical exteriors. On stage, we painstakingly recreated the intricate interior, the details of the three-story masterpiece, down to the hand-carved bookcases and the ornate Newell Post and the beautifully hand-painted wall safe. We invented our own labyrinthical layout, or a labyrinth-style maze, for the upper floor and attic to accommodate for the extended explorations. If you've not seen this movie, or if you have, I know many students probably in this room, young people who have watched that or close to ending this final season, you know that the layout of this house is like a maze. The main characters, Steve, Nancy, and Robin, they're searching for this monster, Vecna, in a labyrinth-like maze. The haunted house scares us when you think about it, the haunted house within our own hearts and minds. It scares us because it can be confusing. You know, an actual physical haunted house, you never know what is lurking behind the corner. Someone may come out of the dark and scream at you, or I know that there are some haunted houses that you have to like even sign a waiver for. That's insane. But you never know what is lurking behind the shadows. When poet and pastor John Donne started to think about his own soul, when he started to think about his own heart and mind, he said the picture, the image, that most stood out to understand himself was that of a labyrinth maze, something that was confusing like you would find in a haunted house. In one of his musings, he wrote, "Poor intricated soul! Riddling, perplexed, labyrinthical soul."

Donne's quote points to the crux of our text this morning. Because of our sin, you and I, I believe, have a haunted house living within our hearts and minds. What do I mean by that? It is our

idolatrous hearts. This passage so vividly talks about the falling and the great sin of idolatry. In this story of Israel's salvation, it gets retraced in the geography of our own souls. When things get difficult, we often try to return to the Egypt of our sin and get lost in our wayward hearts. The story of the golden calf, it doesn't just tell us what happened. It tells us what happens in the haunted house of our hearts. If I was to have a big idea this morning for our text, it would be this.

Because our hearts are perpetual idol factories and sin is utterly destructive, let us daily mortify the flesh and its temptations by offering our lives back to God in response to such amazing grace.

I want you to notice three points this morning in this passage. The first is the effects of idolatry. Second is the power of intercession. And thirdly, our need for a substitute.

Look again at verse one. *The people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, up, make us gods who shall go before us.* There is a forgetfulness that we are seeing in play here. And this is not just a slip of the mind, forgetfulness. It is a blatant forsaking of God. They knew God's law because God first revealed it to them back in chapter twenty four. And then here they have a disdain. They start attacking the servant of the Lord. You see it continuing in verse one. *As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.* You see, this is a dismissal of who he is and what he has done for them. This Moses, it says. These people are exchanging God's glory for a lifeless lump of metal.

I love what John Calvin in his commentary on Exodus writes about this scene. He says, *"In this narrative, we perceive the detestable and piety of the people, their worse than base ingratitude and their monstrous madness mixed with stupidity. Could they not see the pillar of fire in the cloud? Was not God's paternal solicitude abundantly conspicuous every day in the manna? Was he not near them in innumerable ways?"*

If we're not careful, how quickly we lose sight of our identity in Christ for other things, things that shine, things that shimmer, things that we think are enough or will bring us some sense of satisfaction. I want you to think with me of Jesus's words in *Luke 12. And he said to them, Take care and be on your guard against all covetedness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.* You see, church, we are a people that I believe are inclined to mumbling, to murmuring, to complaining when things don't go according to plan. And I think that this posture can very well lead to the sin of covetedness. Jesus warns us of this, and he warns to be watchful of anything or anyone that would seduce you to put your trust in something other or someone other than Christ.

So a question I have for you this morning, church, is there anything or is there anyone in this last week, this last month, this last year that you have put your trust in other than the Lord? If you follow the breadcrumbs of your emotions, what does it reveal? We don't probably like to get into that kind of thought process most of the time, of self-examination, but if you do follow the breadcrumbs of your emotion, what does it reveal? Does it reveal perpetual anxiety about

what's next, about something that is happening to you or to another, or maybe an ungodly anger?

I think you also see not only forgetfulness in this passage, but you see foolishness. Later in verses 21 through 24 of our text, we see this. You see Aaron blame shifting. It reminds us of the fall and it reminds us of the insidiousness of sin. Moses confronts his brother Aaron by saying, What did these people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them? I love this because Moses' posture here, it is both kind and it is candid. Moses is angry, yes, and yet there is amazing self-control in this moment. In foolishness, Aaron attributes the golden calf to just, as you remember in verse 24, just appearing from the fire. And it is clumsy. It is foolish, right? I threw it in the fire and out came this calf. And what he is doing here is he is denying responsibility for his own waywardness and sin.

What's the application? I think what best supports this or holds this up or helps us to see is from God's word in Psalm 139. This may be a well-known text to you in times of self-examination. *Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts and see if there is any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.* When we're tempted to hide in the shadows of the haunted house of our hearts and minds, we remain unconfessed in the darkness of our own sin. But when the Holy Spirit comes, it is like the bright morning star shining through the broken window panes of our souls.

This morning, I would plead with you. I would encourage you. I would challenge you. I'm challenging myself to ask the Holy Spirit to illumine your heart and mind, to illumine your heart and mind to the dark crevices of your heart, your soul that need to be confessed. And when the Holy Spirit shows you what you need to confess, accept responsibility for it. Do exactly the opposite of what Aaron did. Our understanding here is multilayered, though, isn't it? I mean, for me to just say that, you very well could be sitting here this morning and go easy for you to say, Jimmy. It's easy to say that, but in practice, to actually come to a place where we do that self-examination, that hard work of self-examination to get to a place where we confess before a holy God. It's multilayered. It's complicated because relationships are complicated. They're tricky and complex and difficult to understand at times. Relationships matter. Situations matter. And yet, at the end of the day, I believe whatever your context, whatever your circumstance, many times it could be as simply as saying, as confessing, God, I am bitter. God, I am impatient. God, I am unkind. God, I'm afraid of other people's opinion of me. Rather than putting the blame or shifting the blame like Aaron.

For Aaron, though, there is still a blatant blindness. The failure of this high priest will bring judgment on the people, but it will ultimately point to their salvation. Look with me at verses seven through nine. *And the Lord said to Moses, Go down for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and worshipped it and sacrificed to it and said, These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. And the Lord said to Moses, I've seen this people and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now, therefore, let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them.* Notice the pronouns

here in this text. Remember, earlier in Exodus 29, God says, *I will dwell among the people of Israel and I will be their God. And they shall know that I'm the Lord, their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the Lord, their God.* But here in 32, we see the reality that God gives them over to their idolatry. They are not his people. They are your people. They took the knowledge of God and exchanged it for a beast of gold and began to evangelize others and what they had done. The ones in Exodus three who were referred to as my sons now become your people. A holy nation is now a stiff-necked people.

Have you ever wondered why the Israelites worshiped a cow? Well, because they had never entirely forsaken their gods of Egypt. You remember earlier in the text when Aaron was asking for the earrings, these different little signposts and breadcrumbs that were reflective of the lingering sin, the lingering idolatry. They promised with their lips to serve God, but in their hearts lurked wickedness of the old humanity. I think we do the same thing. I know we do the same thing.

Too often, our struggle against sin, we focus almost exclusively on our actions rather than the root of our problem, which is our heart.

I have a question for you this morning, or another question. Where are you lost in the haunted house of your heart and mind? If you don't want to think about a haunted house, that's fine. But I would just I would challenge you and I'm speaking to myself. Where have the breadcrumbs led as you have maybe done a little bit of self-examination? I mean, we are literally on the heels on the eve of a time when countless people do self-examination of, oh, I'm going to do this better. I'm going to do that better. I'm going to do more of this.

In verse 18, Moses and Joshua, you see, you hear these noises and they describe it. They're not battle cries or laments, but singing and dancing before the golden calf. And in righteous anger, Moses destroys the cow. And this is pretty intense. He grounds it into powder and he makes them drink it. You see, what Moses wants these people to do is to regain self-control. He intervenes in this moment to bring this sin to a halt. And these very people, they consume the works of their own hands. They drink the bitterness of sin. They are coming face to face with the reality of their actions.

We need to put to death whatever remains as idols in our life, church. And again, I know it's easier said than done, but one of the more encouraging books to me as I daily battle with sin, is John Owen's book on the mortification of sin. And I remember reading it in my 20s. And this is one of the more memorable lines from that book. But he says, *Do you mortify? Do you make it your daily work? Be always at it whilst you live. Cease not a day from this work. Be killing sin or it will be killing you.*

You see, idolatry strips us of our power. It robs you and I of our dignity. It makes us, as the text says, a stiff-necked people. The image that is at play here is literally, it makes you into an animal. You are like an animal. It makes you like a beast of burden that will not submit to the master's yoke. It makes you like a calf. When you worship an idol, you don't simply bow down to

something else. You begin, as we know in this room, every one of us that have felt the effects of idolatry, you begin to be shaped by it. Scripture says, *Those who make them become like them.* That's *Psalm 115*. Idolatry quietly, I think, many times reshapes our heart. It dulls our wisdom, it clouds our vision. And I know that even for me, in this last week, I have felt the destructive power of idolatry. Not in obvious or dramatic ways, but one that I think is maybe a little bit more eerie in ordinary ways. A desire for control when trust felt uncomfortable. A temptation to take matters into my own hands rather than to rest in the Lord's care.

That is how idolatry often works. It doesn't announce itself. I think it actually whispers. So let this be a warning to us and let it also be an invitation at the same time to be watchful, church, of the things that promise relief, but slowly pull your attention away from God. And wherever the spirit brings something to light, don't excuse it and don't despair. Bring it to the light. Confess it. This is where Israel stumbled. They did not want to wait on the Lord. They wanted to worship on their own terms, their timing, their style, their priest, their altar. And in that moment, the very purpose of Exodus, their freedom, their communion with God, their life with him was hanging in the balance.

Brings us to our second point, the power of intercession.

Verse 10 says, *Now, therefore, let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them in order that I may make a great nation of you.* It's in this moment that the mediator speaks and the pronouns change again. We see it in verses 11 through 12, Moses interceding for God's people. *But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, Oh, Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?* Moses is pleading here. And he does so on the basis of God's glory, not on the worthiness of the people and not for his own advancement. God has just offered Moses an astonishing alternative. He says, essentially, he says, I will consume these people and then I'm going to start it all over again with you. And he could have walked away as the father of a new nation.

But Moses refuses. Why? He intercedes, not because Israel deserves mercy, but because God's name is at stake. He is far more concerned with God's glory than he is his own advancement, than he is his own future, his own life. Regarding this moment, Philip Riken writes about this with Moses. *He says, faced with a dictator's dream, the cloning of an entire nation from himself, he opts instead to staunchly defend the very people who have already caused him grief through their rebelling. And who will continue to do so with the ensuing wanderings. Given the choice between serving himself and saving others, he puts others first. This is the mark of a true man of God. He chooses God's greater glory over his own personal good.* That kind of faith is not abstract. It is deeply practical. Because when we are waging war with our idolatrous hearts, what brings peace in those moments, church, is not self-justification. It's not self-promotion. But I believe it is a right vision of who God is. This is why A.W. Tozer's words, I believe, are so penetrating. He says,

the essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of him.

You see, idolatry always shrinks God, the view of God that we have in our imagination. Intercession, on the other hand, I believe, enlarges our view of God.

And that leads directly, I think, to our application here, is that the Apostle Peter warns us in *2 Peter 3:17*. *You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away by the error of lawless people and lose your own stability*. In other words, we are not authorities unto ourselves. Stability does not come from trusting our instincts. Stability does not come in our Western world that we like to try to convince ourselves of, of a pull yourself up by your bootstraps kind of mentality, or from following the crowd, it comes from anchoring ourselves in what is true about God. It is not ultimately whether people approve of us or whether we approve of ourselves that determines our direction, it is the one whose approval we labor under. And when that becomes clear, I believe that the fraud of idolatry is exposed for what it is. It cannot compete with the joy, the joy of knowing the one true God that saves. G.K. Beale puts it this way. *What people revere, they resemble either for ruin or for restoration*.

So here's another question I have for us this morning as we confront this passage. In 2025 and as 2026 approaches, what is our song? What is your song? Is it a song of ruin or is it a song of restoration?

Earlier in Exodus, when Pharaoh and his army swallowed up the Red Sea, the response of the people is unmistakable. You remember? They sing, they celebrate, they erupt into joy. Exodus 15 tells us that Miriam, the prophetess, takes a tambourine in her hand and she leads the people in song. *Exodus 15:21, sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider, he has thrown into the sea*. Miriam becomes a dancer. The people become singers. Those who have been ransomed by grace are a people of song. They give voice to their joy. They celebrate what the Lord has done. And that's why idolatry is so dangerous, because idolatry does not eliminate joy. But it is a counterfeit. It is a counterfeit joy. It offers a song, but it is the wrong song. It promises celebration, but it does not deliver. It's fool's gold. It entices like the worm at the end of a hook. And it masquerades as authentic. And that is precisely why idolatry is a fraud. It is deceitful.

Now I want us to hold that image of singing and celebrating together with what happens in Exodus 32. In verse 10, God offers Moses the opportunity to become the father of a new nation. God is prepared to judge the people and reset. And Moses refuses. Instead of grasping at personal glory, Moses intercedes. He pleads for mercy. He stands in the gap. And here is the staggered irony of this moment. While the people are chasing after other gods. What is Moses doing? He is meeting with the true God. While they are rejecting the Lord, Moses is pleading with the Lord on their behalf. While they are dancing around an idol, Moses is receiving God's word so that they might truly live as God's people. Have you ever considered a more ironic scene? It's insane. I mean, it's wild. God is essentially saying to Moses, do not come near me. I'm going to judge them. And yet Moses still draws near. He intercedes. He pleads. It is unbelievable. Boldly interceding for the sake of a stiff-necked people.

And this boldness is not presumption, church. I believe that it's faith. It's exactly what the apostle Paul is talking about in Ephesians three when he says that in Christ. *In Christ, we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.* Moses becomes a picture of how God's people can approach God. Not because they are righteous, but because God is gracious. And that leads us to a truth that we cannot miss this morning. As sinners, you and I, we need a mediator. And that is Jesus. He is the greater Moses. We have an ultimate mediator in Christ.

Brings us to our third and final point. Our need for a substitute.

The Israelites knew that it was that it was not simply enough to know what God had said. They had the law. They knew they were not supposed to make idols or worship other gods. The problem was not ignorance. The problem was inability. They could not keep the law. And that truth presses in on us doesn't it, this season? We've just celebrated Christmas. The truth that God has spoken, the truth that God has come near to us, that the word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have sung the songs. We have heard the promises. But now Christmas has passed and a new year is quickly approaching. And the question quietly confronting us is this for each and every one of us.

What are you going to carry forward? What are you going to carry forward into this new year?

What Israel needed and what we need is not simply clear instruction for the next year, stronger resolve. I mean, this last week, I was even thinking of the multitude of things that were coming into my imagination. I need to do more of this. I want to be better at this. I want to do this. But we all know our resolutions, as inventive or creative as they may be, many times they falter, if not all of them falter.

We need something, not just better habits. We need someone outside of ourselves as Hovie was reminding us this morning in our confession. We need a substitute. We need a savior. This is why every time we gather for worship, and I probably sound somewhat like a clanging symbol to my students and a lot of the young people that I try to talk about Jesus with, is I try to press into them the beauty and the wonder of the church gathered. That it is not just some essay that is being read when the sermon is preached, but it is the proclamation of the living word of God that is going out and the Holy Spirit is penetrating hearts and minds and illuminating minds to confess and to take stock and examination and to recenter and to refocus their gaze on Christ, the ultimate mediator, the perfect substitute. Every sermon is a plea to be reconciled to God. Every gathering is a summons to taste and see that the Lord is good. Every service of worship church is a call to let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Because the consequences, as we see here in this text, the consequences of rejecting the Lord, of nurturing the haunted house, the idol factories that we constantly are tempted to give into, the consequences are clear. It ends in death. It is a path that leads to destruction.

The reality comes crashing down in verse 26 when Moses cries out, *Who is on the Lord's side?* Judgment is being visited upon this camp. God is drawing a clear line in the sand. Then the question is no longer theoretical. Three thousand men fall. It is an absolute demand of loyalty.

And that feels foreign to us, maybe, almost jarring to modern ears, especially in a season when we are accustomed to softer messages and fresh starts. But this scene is not cruel and it is not unreasonable. It is a reminder that we were made to worship the one true God and nothing and no one else. To turn from him is not freedom. It is death. It is destruction.

And then in one of the most astonishing turns of the book of Exodus, you see the scene shift, don't you? Moses pleads with God and this is crazy. He offers himself and he goes so far to say, blot my name out of the book of life. He is willing to undergo death and damnation so that they might know life and salvation. Who does that? Why would he do that? Because God is a saving God. As the apostle Paul later writes in 2 Corinthians 1, *it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us and who has also put his seal on us and given us his spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.* And yet Moses's offer, no matter how noble, it's not enough, right?

As this new year approaches, church, this matters deeply. What am I trying to say? Good intentions will not save you. Fresh starts will not save you. I'll get it better this next time. Resolutions, discipline and determination, although those things are good in and of themselves, ultimately though they will not save you. There must be a better mediator, Jesus Christ, who is the better servant, who is the better high priest, who is the better reformer, who is the better corrector, who is the one and only Savior. He is the true mediator. He is the perfect substitute standing between our haunted house, our idolatrous hearts and a holy God. And it is through his substitutionary death, Jesus was treated like a beast, broken and burned for a stiff-necked people on the cross. Jesus gave his life so that your name and my name would not be blotted out. This is why Christmas matters. And this is why the new year matters. Jesus Christ was faithful as a son that we might be freed. Not just forgiven, that you might be freed. Freed from a haunted house. Our restlessness, our anxiety, our idol-making hearts, our minds, freed, not just forgiven.

So as this new year comes to a close, or as this year comes to a close and the new year approaches, I plead with you, as I plead in preaching this to myself, do not place your hope in resolve, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, look to Christ, gaze upon him, relish and remember anew this day, the glory and the goodness of the mercy of a God who saves and know that he will deliver you from evil. Let us pray.

Holy and gracious God, we confess that our hearts are prone to wander. We are impatient and we don't like waiting. Would you please forgive us for the idols that we cling to, of power, of status, of resume, whatever it is, the ways that this week we have trusted in ourselves because we think that is better rather than trusting in you. We need you. We need your spirit. We need your spirit to illumine our minds so that we, by your grace and your mercy, would have the humility, would have the courage to maybe face what we are scared to face, to humble ourselves before a Holy God. By your spirit, would you put to death what is false within us? Would you teach us to worship you alone? And would we as a church, as Christ Presbyterian Church, would we fix our eyes on Christ, our perfect Savior and hope? We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.