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## *God Changes His Mind*

**An article for the *Cathedral Times* by Dean Sam Candler**

Many of us spend significant time trying to change someone else's mind. We usually have good reasons to do so! Maybe we are a parent, trying to get our child to change her mind about something. Maybe we are a supervisor, trying to persuade an associate to change his mind about something. Maybe we are a preacher, trying to get sermon listeners to change their minds! Maybe we are even a politician trying to get a voter to change his or her mind.

When people do change their minds, we often applaud them. They got it, we say! They turned to the right side! They made the healthy choice! And it is true that changing one's mind can be a good thing.

Yet, somehow, we also tend to denigrate people who change their minds. When leaders change their minds (to a position we disagree with), we claim that they are wishy-washy, that we can't trust them. Politicians are especially susceptible to this accusation. The watchful media, and its massive archives, are ever vigilant, probing for some way that a politician is going against something he or she said previously.

Exodus 32 describes one of the most dramatic mind changes in scripture. Moses, up on the mountain with Yahweh, has been delayed in returning to his people. Somehow, the restless people throw their gold into a fire, and "out came this calf" (said Aaron at Exodus 32: 24 – with the feigned innocence of a five-year-old!). They had fabricated an idol. Yahweh is furious, and in an astounding moment, says to Moses that he, God, will annihilate those people, get rid of them all, and create from Moses a new people. In short, God tells Moses that he, God, will start all over again. Wow!

But, in an even more astounding moment, Moses begins arguing with Yahweh. Moses is trying to save his people. And the Bible actually says that Moses is trying to get God to "change his mind." In the next amazing development, God is persuaded by Moses not to destroy the Hebrew people. Finally, in a still more astounding moment, the Bible says quite clearly that Yahweh "changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people" (Exodus 32:14).

Yes, the Bible says that God changed his mind. In fact, if you read the old King James Version of that same verse, you will read that God "repented" of that possibility. Now, we might think that it would be theoretically impossible for God to change his mind, or to repent! But the Bible seems to say otherwise.

Some of you have been following my "spiritual leadership principles," which I hope have been helpful guides over the years. One of my favorite leadership principles goes like this. "If you want people to go somewhere, go there first." So, if you are someone who wants to change peoples' minds, whoever you are, the best way to do that is to show them how. The best way to show people how to change their minds is to change your mind yourself.

If you, a parent, want your children to change their minds, show them gracefully and honorably that you can change your mind, too. If you, a supervisor, want your people to change, show them yourself how to change gracefully.

If you are God, if you are Yahweh, and you want your people to change their minds, the best thing you can do is to show them that you can change your mind, too. It's right there in Exodus 32. The story is another instance of the principle of Incarnation: God loves humanity so much that God becomes humanity.

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