Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

January 12, 2020

Old Testament Reading; Isaiah 42: 1-9

Responsive Reading; Psalm 29

Epistle Reading; Acts: 10: 34-43

Gospel Reading; Matthew 3: 13-17

Sermon Title: **NEW THINGS I DECLARE**

 By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Former things have come to pass, and from those former things God has called us. Us, not a chosen few, but all of us.

In last week’s message, Don told us that God did not change between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Rather our understanding of God and His personality was perfected.

In the Old Testament we saw dimly but in the New we saw face to face. When we draw a glass of water from a faucet, we see the faucet but not the source. We do not see the bottom of the well or the water plant. When a prophet healed or raised the dead the recipient did not see God but rather the conduit that God used to deliver his miracle. When Jesus healed or raised the dead, the recipient saw God’s face, heard God’s voice and felt God’s touch.

The writers of the Old Testament did the best they could to represent God with the limited resources they had and the religious environment of the time.

Theologians debate whether the prophecies of the Old Testament were accurate or were updated at a later time to enhance the reader’s belief. I believe that both ideas probably come into play at different times but I also believe that sometimes God gives extra meaning to things that we say without our understanding of how significant those statements would be in the future. Selfishly I hope this happens with my sermons.

I base this belief in part on a prayer I heard a 4-year-old say following a children’s sermon. He said, “Dear God, thank you for the people we love. Dear God, thank you for the other people”. I am sure that that 4-year-old meant family as the people we love, and the rest of the congregation hearing the prayer as the other people, but the words say so much more. We are supposed to love our enemies, but how can we love our enemies if we do not accept that they are gifts from God to help us fulfill his plan for us? If a 4-year-old can be a prophet of God, then maybe there is hope for the rest of us.

In our Old Testament lesson Isaiah is speaking in a rough time in Hebrew history. The Jews are in exile and do not see any light at the end of the tunnel. Isaiah is speaking of a time that God will bring on that is better than their present situation. Isaiah personifies that event by saying God will send this New Thing in a person. Was Isaiah referring to Christ or personifying an event? I have my own belief. I do not know if Isaiah was intentionally referring to Jesus but I believe that God inserted that meaning into his words. I believe this was a legitimate prophesy whether Isaiah knew it or not. God’s got this.

Isaiah refers to a light to the Gentiles that will open the eyes of the blind and to bring out prisoners from the prison. There is no one so blind as one who will not see, and there is no one so imprisoned as one imprisoned by despair and lack of a hope in wonderful things unseen. Jesus gave sight to the blind and gives us spiritual sight. Jesus frees us from the prison of despair, doubt and lack of a spiritual hope that comes from the lesson of his promises kept. God says that He is going to bring about changes and that he will give us a heads up, so be alert. [The world needs more lerts.] OK, that’s a trucker’s joke. Oops!

In our Epistle lesson, “Peter opened his mouth and said: In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ, He is Lord of all.”

The Old Testament describes the Chosen People as the Jews and that is a pretty good place to start. After all, at that time every culture had their own God base that was particular to them. Abraham had his God base and we definitely feel this is more realistic than any other and much more verified by history and the Bible.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” i.e. God through Jesus eliminates all spiritual blindness and frees all imprisoned souls. There is no partiality. No chosen few. All are chosen if they realize that with great privilege comes great responsibility.

Jesus bound himself to man, not only by taking on the form of man but also taking on the religious duties of man. Jesus was circumcised [a duty of Jews] and Jesus was baptized. He who was without sin went through the ritual to remove sin because he refused not to be completely joined in form and function to humankind that He came to save.

The prophets did their jobs. Jesus did His job. Now we are asked to follow suit.

This is where I pick on you again. In a church where most of us have more years behind us than years ahead of us I don’t even give you a break. “Behold, the former things have come to pass, And new things I declare; Before they spring forth, I tell you of them.” This is where our Old Testament lesson ended but the next line says, “Sing to the Lord a new song, And His praise from the ends of the earth.” i.e. Live your faith. Do for the Lord as He has done for you.

You know God is no more thrilled by someone giving CPR or running into a burning building to save someone then he is of someone who stops to console someone who is hurting or sends a message of concern to someone who is sick or grieving.

God only asks you to do what you can do but it hurts him when we do not spread the love that he has shown for us.

Recently someone called me a saint for how I interact with my neighbors at my senior living home. It broke my heart because I know that I am only doing the minimum of what God asks of me. If I stand out for doing the minimum then God is being seriously shortchanged.

Please, do not short change God. God loves us so much and all He asks is that we return that love by loving our neighbors.

We are called to spread God’s love; let’s continue to be his ambassadors this year and every year. Hallelujah and Amen