

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

January 28, 2018 4th Sunday after Epiphany

Old Testament Reading; Deuteronomy 18: 15-20

Responsive Reading; Psalm 111

Epistle Reading; 1st Corinthians 8: 1-13

Gospel Reading; Mark 1: 21-28

Sermon Title: SPIKE STRIPS IN THE ROAD

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Spike strips can stop a fleeing felon but they can also stop a car on the way to the ER.

The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear. I will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.

And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Being strong in the faith we understand this prediction from Deuteronomy and we understand how Jesus "taught with authority". We took a long time getting to this place where we

are at. There are a lot of babes of the faith that are unfamiliar with Jesus and uncomfortable in giving him their trust.

In the Epistle lesson Paul says, "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble." This is an example. For me I should say, "If cursing should make my brother stumble I will never use strong language again." This is easier said than done as those in the adult Sunday school could attest to.

When my buttons get pushed I react and things pop out of my mouth that I did not even know were there. In that Sunday school class and in this sanctuary no-one is weak enough in their faith to be chased away from Jesus because I said something inappropriate.

BUT, if someone were to come to our church, because they were distraught with their life and actions, and wanted a community that would build them up and help them to clean up their mouths and lives. If this person or these people heard me talk in the manor that they were trying to escape they might very well walk out saying, "Oh well, that was a total waste of time."

This would be like me throwing a spike strip in their road to Jesus.

In today's bulletin Mike has placed a picture of a bus being driven by Jesus with the notation saying "Riding with Jesus."

This is so cool because if you were to throw a spike strip in front of a bus driven by Jesus it would have no more effect than throwing a storm around the boat that Jesus and the disciples were riding in. In the boat Jesus raised his hand and the storm stopped and in the bus Jesus could raise his hand and the bus would become a hovercraft floating in the air with the flat tires just flapping in the wind.

Paul is warning us to be careful lest we accidentally throw a spike strip in the road of a babe in Christ.

For instance if we hear someone going off on someone that has perpetrated a despicable act and they are saying something like, "God will get them. God is going to make them pay. They are going to suffer and then go to Hell! Jesus will fix them!"

If the incident is a pedophile, or a mass murder or a drunk that just caused an accident that killed three children and our reaction is, "Jesus does not work that way." Or "Jesus is a loving and forgiving God." If this is a babe in the faith they just might respond, "Well if Jesus is that much of a wuss I don't want anything to do with him."

An example of a response that might be better might be, "Well if I were Jesus I probably would react like that but you know

Jesus saved me when I was at my worst, and, when he was hanging on the cross he asked God to forgive his murderers so I don't know just how he would react, but I sure hear where you are coming from."

The point is, don't put someone down for not getting it right the first time.

In Galatians Paul says, "be guided by the spirit...and the fruit of the spirit is Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control." Notice, no spike strips mentioned.

If we can keep our cool and reflect the light of Jesus in our lives we will surely "let your light so shine before men that they see your good works, i.e. love and patience, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

When your life and words glorify God they cause the seeker to have faith in what he or she is seeking. If the seeker finds Jesus they will find true happiness and an eternal life worth living. This is a good thing and it our responsibility not to do anything that would deprive someone the joy of knowing Jesus.

This joy will enable the new Christian to join us in our Psalm reading today and say with us; I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, In the assembly of the upright and in the congregation. The works of the Lord are great, studied by all

who have pleasure in them. His word is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever. Hallelujah and amen.